BROWSING AMONG BOOKS,

AND OTHER ESSAYS.

BY

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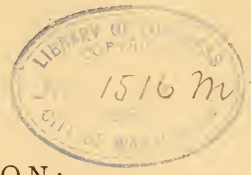

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BROWSING AMONG BOOKS.

THE gentle Elia informs us, in one of those essays which the world still loves to read, that Cousin Bridget in her youth was suffered to browse at will upon the fair and wholesome pasturage of a good English library; and he adds his belief that such an education makes most incomparable old maids. When we remember how many authors, besides Pope, Shakspeare, and Jean Jacques, have thus gained their stock of learning, with little favor from the schools, we may add that desultory reading can make, also, incomparable poets and philosophers, when genius has not been wanting at the start. The habit of skimming hastily through many volumes was one which Dr. Johnson acquired in early life; and, unlike most

of the habits to which he was a slave, he was able to defend it as sensible and expedient. Choate, our brilliant orator, delighted to linger for hours before an open book-stall, dipping here and there into the attractive pages that he found, all unmindful of the hurry and bustle around him. It appears, then, that to men of superior talents this browsing among books may atone, in some measure, for the lack of that early systematic training which fortune has denied; while, in their maturer years, the learned resort to it, not only for diversion, but that they may keep abreast with the passing thought and the varied culture of their times.

The student is prone in early life to condemn all superficial reading as unworthy of a serious mind. In his enthusiasm, he thinks to master the whole world of literature by thorough, vigorous plodding; but after much of this diligent work he begins to realize the hopelessness of the task. Could the printing-presses be stopped for ten years, he might retire into some happy valley to peruse the treasured legacies of the past, and then

emerge, ready to attend to the ideas of his contemporaries. But those tireless engines keep ever at work, and threaten to inundate him with their floods of science, biography, history, and art. He learns, at length, the necessity of gleaning the worth of many volumes, while ignoring the preface and never reaching the word Finis at the close. A few earnest, engrossing books, however, will always demand his close attention; and by studying these his mind will be preserved from the loose habits of thought to which an excess of literary browsing tends.

He learns, also, that certain books are best read in this desultory manner; and, in the intervals of continuous thought, he will smile over a paper in the "Spectator," and laugh at an adventure of Don Quixote or Gil Blas. A scene from the old comedies, a paragraph of Sir Thomas Browne's delectable English, are better than whole acts and chapters at a time; and in no other way than by fragments will he follow the adventures of Una and the Knight in Spenser's "Faerie Queene." Irving and Goldsmith, even, cannot delight us at long sit-

tings; the quiet, musical flow of their limpid style may prove captivating for moments, but it becomes monotonous after an hour.

The chief advantage of a library of the best authors, such as Bridget Elia knew, is the opportunity it affords for learning something of the elder writers, famous and yet forgotten, whose works we may not hope to explore, and which, very likely, we should make no effort to obtain. The worth of many of these great names of literature we have come to take on trust; and we concede their rank without examining their credentials. Owing to the multitude of new claimants for its favor, the world is forced every year to add to their number. What general reader of to-day knows for himself that Bacon is the great and comprehensive philosopher, that Dryden is a master of magnificent prose and verse, and that Swift's sarcasm can burn and scorch? Southey had wrought steadily at his Kehamas and Thalabas in vain for us, if previous generations had not left on record what they are like. Pope and Byron are fast losing their readers; and who can say how

many of the illustrious writers of the present time shall be sent during the next century to this limbo of immortal names? They may live in cyclopædias and compendiums; and their ideas will diffuse themselves, perhaps, into the literary atmosphere of the age; but their works, in unworn bindings, must adorn the upper shelves of libraries of the classics. We become acquainted with such authors only when an hour's leisure in their presence suggests to us that it might be well to dip lightly into their richly freighted tomes.

There is one class of books in which we delight to browse, — the few that we have read with cordial sympathy and can never give up. We all keep near us a choice company of such favorites, and turn to them in idle moments for brief snatches of enjoyment. The familiar characters that move and speak between their well-worn covers, the scenes pictured there, the thoughts spoken, make for us a hidden world of enchantment, into which we gladly escape when our own surroundings become dull or perplexing. These volumes are shabby with age and merciless wear, their leaves

are strewn with pressed violets and bits of faded ribbon, their margins are pencil-marked, and the last pages of the novels are scarred with traces of sentimental tears; but they wear for our eyes unfading charms. On taking them up, we indulge in a childish fancy and open at hazard, thinking to meet some passage appropriate to our mood; and we are startled, now and then, into a thrill of pleasure at our success; but oftener we dip here and there in search of any forgotten lines that may come to us as fresh as on their first perusal.

These favorites of the mind are likely to be as undeserving as those of royal courts; they may lack the sanction of the wise, they may be ridiculous good-for-nothings; but it is enough for us that they suit us. If we have stumbled upon them in the by-ways of our reading, we prize them the more because few have understood them; if the world has long proclaimed them great, we have been surprised to find that what impressed the common heart had any peculiar message for our own. Thus the kings and the outcasts of literature may stand side by side in that little company which every reader cherishes as special friends.

Perhaps it is Bettine who speaks to us in our leisure hour, delighting by the piquant freshness of her descriptions and the charm of her wayward thought. She is always the bright, vivacious child, in character if not in years; seeing straight to the heart of things, loving nature and copying her beauties, prattling of great mysteries, and revealing the depths of her own innermost soul. We may allow that she wanders into rhapsodies which no mortal can comprehend, and translates them for us into the drollest German-English; but nothing hinders us from skipping the one and laughing at the other. Sprinkled among such extravagances, we find pictures of her life that transport us to the little town and the famous people among whom she dwelt; and it is of these that we never tire. We float with her upon the brimming Rhine; she leads us to the ruined chapel on the height; through the silent forest; into the convent garden, when the moon is high; we sit with her at the feet of Frau Rath, to talk of her son Goethe; and, when the post-horn blows, the proud Frankfort dame relates the story of her

girlish love for the Emperor; and we listen till we catch the great enthusiasm kindling in her eyes. Yes, wayward, gifted, little letter-writer, it is true that the critics do not love you overmuch; but you have woven for the world a tapestry of bright images and graceful fancies that will never fade.

The novels to which we return, after the first interest is gone, are seldom those built upon plot alone; unless, with an artist's eye, we desire to trace calmly the steps over which we have been hurried blindly to the *dénouement*. Perhaps, of modern English story-tellers, Wilkie Collins is the one who relies most entirely upon mechanism for his effects; and no one cares to read him the second time. His novels have become void of attraction when the last page is reached. "Jane Eyre" is sufficiently intense and exciting in the development of its plot; but probably no work of fiction is more often perused in this irregular manner, after every incident has become familiar, and when a dark, inscrutable mystery no longer lures us breathless to the close. Each paragraph is a picture, finished in the clearest, softest hues; and,

glance where we will, we are entranced by the vivid coloring before us. It is a book to browse over on winter evenings, when we listen beside a glowing grate to hear the wind rattling against the pane. At such times we shiver with the little orphan as she walks among the shrubbery, along the frozen paths; we watch the gay party of disdainful ladies at Thornfield Hall sweeping down into the drawing-room between swaying curtains, while Jane and her happy charge await them, trembling, in the corner; or we wander with the homeless governess, hungry and footsore, over the lonely moor. These descriptions afford perennial delight; for a skilful artist chose each graphic word, and set in place the contrasting scenes; while in every line glows the undying fire of individuality and genius.

Nor can we abandon George Eliot's novels after one hurried perusal. The crowded canvas which she spreads before us may reveal many commonplace and ungainly figures, with only here and there a noble being gliding amid the throng; but the homely personages stand out so real and

solid in their prosaic vulgarity, that, like a rare Dutch painting, they tempt our eyes from the dainty, shadowy portraiture of less faithful limners. No single oddity of look, manner, or phrase, however amusing, has tempted her to personify a quality into a character, as it tempted Dickens to do; but every creature of her make shows a rounded, composite nature, like that of the flesh-and-blood people about us. The sombre garbs and dull environments of her characters find relief against a background of sunny landscape and breezy sky; and into their rustic speech she drops the sly humor of the philosophic observer and the reflective wisdom of the sage.

We might wish she had more mercy on our race, and were content to idealize a little the material she finds to copy; for, in her severe truthfulness, she preaches the saddest of all truths, — that the noble aspiration of youth, winging its way bravely towards the skies, is always beaten back to earth at last, and must inevitably succumb to the honest stupidity and sordid self-interest of the conventional life among which it dwells. But, though

defeated, it is never false to itself; and the soul from which it sprung still proffers it a shrine, and reverences in secret the indwelling presence which others have despised.

So it is, that to her panoramic view of human existence, with all its weighty problems and sorry actors, wherein Philanthropy and Originality fight single-handed against the trained cohorts of the Philistines, and go down before their conquerors, we turn again and again for repeated glimpses, only to come away heavy-hearted, and with a fresh grievance against Fate.

At the opening of spring, if doomed to the dusty bricks of city streets, while our whole soul longs to be where we can see the catkins feathering the willow twigs and hear the loosened brooks rushing under the alders, we find our solace for captivity in the writings of some simple and loyal lover of nature. Then it is that the "Complete Angler" delights us anew. Its pages prove to be still redolent of the freshness of those fine May mornings, when the sun shone so brightly that the gentle linen-draper was fain to close his little

shop, and to start off, with rod over his shoulder, toward the meadows and brooks that he loved so well. We are pleased to listen to his discourse, as he baits his curious hook and prepares to swing it over the rushes; we feel the drops of the smoking shower that send him hurrying to the willow-tree; and, when the cloud rolls away, it is a bonny milkmaid that sings for us the shepherd's pastoral, and a sweet draught of milk that her mother hands us at its close. The fields and the brooks that we sigh for are blooming and purling in the pages that Izaak Walton went home to write.

Or we turn to the records left by another lover of nature, who preferred the forest to the meadow, and who, though he loved men and culture less, loved frogs and fishes more; for it was not in the heart of Thoreau to drop a line into his woodland streams, much less to put a living frog upon his hook "as though he loved him." From his hut by Walden Pond we watch the flight of lonely birds, the lapping of water upon the sand, the battle of ants in the door-yard; or we journey off beside him to note the expected opening of a flower and the

glory of certain lordly trees. It is a savage wildness that he reveals to us, undreamed of by the London shopkeeper; but delineated with the same truth and sympathetic love which have created anew, for so many generations of readers, those sunny, showery mornings upon the banks of the Dove. Chaucer, also, can give us the breath and glad radiance of May; and perhaps the poets know best what words are like the tender beauties of the spring.

A contrast with our own surroundings makes such books most welcome. Wearing out our days in the quiet of country life, we should doubtless prefer pictures of the life and adventure of cities; and Pepys would then spread for us his photographic pages, where we might behold gay lords and ladies loitering upon palace steps, playing idly with hats and feathers, while they awaited the coming of the merry monarch who was to lead their cavalcade.

As we grow older, our browsing is limited to a smaller field. Two or three of the greatest works become our companions; and the reading of pre-

vious years seems only to have taught us how to value these. Unfortunate is the man who has not learned in youth to find in some such cherished volumes a world of calm, enduring pleasure, to cheer and occupy his age.

CATS.

CATS are not historic. Other animals, by noble qualities and serviceable deeds, have won for themselves a place in the chronicles of mankind: we read of the wolf that suckled the twin princes of Rome; of the warning geese that cackled before her gates; and connect, in our memory, the battles of Alexander as much with the horse Bucephalus as with the great hero himself. But though cats have so long been associated with our domestic life, no individual member of the race seems ever to have figured in any important event. The story of Dick Whittington and his cat forms a part of nursery legends; but the mythical Lord Mayor, and his still more mythical companion, can hardly be ranked among the dignities of history.

One nation, it is true, has paid to these creatures extraordinary honors. It seems to us vastly amusing that the Egyptians should have built temples to their cats, even worshipping them above all other animals; forbidding them to be killed on pain of death, and commanding a whole household to shave their eyebrows when an old tabby among them chanced to die from the infirmities of age. Life has gone hard with their descendants since the days of the Pharaohs; and if the lank, persecuted wretches who skulk across our city yards preserve among themselves any tradition of that happy past, they must sigh oftentimes for their paradise upon the banks of the Nile, where kittens were never drowned, and small boys never shied stones after their flying feet, and where fresh milk and warm cushions were always awaiting them at the Grand Vizier's expense.

In times when people dared to be superstitious, it was never doubted that there was something uncanny about a cat, that she loved evil, and was one of his Satanic Majesty's most trusty servants. For some strange power it must be that enabled her

always to come down upon her feet, though tossed never so high, and to emit sparks of fire from her fur when rubbed in frosty weather. It was ever convenient to attribute things to the devil which one did not understand. She was accordingly the familiar of witches; and we find the weird sisters in "Macbeth" responding to a call from Graymalkin. When entirely black, she was herself a witch; and woe to the house where this ominous creature appeared.

The belief that she possesses nine lives would seem to have some foundation in fact; there is proof positive that death is only a temporary inconvenience to the feline race, from which they soon recover. A gentleman, for whose veracity we will vouch, desiring to rid himself of a cat and her family of kittens, plunged them into a pond and left them to perish. Not wishing to deprive them of the rites of sepulture, he afterwards removed their lifeless bodies, and gave them decent burial in an adjoining field. But, on passing the spot the following morning, his astonished eyes beheld mother Puss above ground, in apparent

possession of all her faculties, and busily at work digging up her departed kittens. Of the depth of the interment we are not informed; it was probably slight; perhaps consisted only of a few handfuls of earth sprinkled over them, such as Horace makes the shade of Archytas beg the traveller to scatter over his unburied remains,

licebit
Injecto ter pulvere curras;

but their speedy resurrection from drowning and the grave prove that two, at least, of the nine lives are no fable.

Cats have been held to be the fitting companions of old maids; and solitary females are supposed to garnish their chimney-corners with one of these animals, as a melancholy solace in their dismal lot. But domiciles of this character are seldom seen now-a-days; and despite the fact that a moribund spinster did indeed leave a legacy, a few years ago, to maintain a surviving tabby, and that the seven wives of St. Ives, as everybody knows, were once met travelling, each with several hundred specimens of the race in her seven sacks, we declare

our belief that women in general have no liking for cats, and only submit to their presence as the least of two evils, of which mice are the greater. Mrs. Barbauld, it is true, indited a wise letter of advice from "Grimalkin to Selima;" and among Joanna Baillie's poems is found a description of the playful gambols of the kitten, which is a rare piece of faithful writing; but these are rather close studies in natural history, than expressions of affectionate regard. And biographies of women show us that the true-hearted honesty and generous devotion of the dog obtain much readier appreciation in the female heart. We remember how Mary Mitford doted over her father's old pointers and greyhounds, how much Emily Brontë endured from her favorite mastiff, Keeper, and how lovingly Elizabeth Browning has sung the praises of Flush, her dog.

It is among men that cats find their warmest admirers; and they are generally men of culture and of a solitary life. The lithe grace of movement, and soft, purring ways of these household pets, their love of luxurious living, and even the

winning treachery of their actions, seem to atone, in some measure, for the loss of the society of ladies, of whose qualities they are, perhaps, the reminders. From his grim bachelor quarters at Cambridge, Gray wrote one of the few tributes to their beauty to be found in our polite and classic literature; and his "Lines on a favorite cat drowned in a tub of gold-fishes" are in a tone of gallant, playful satire, quite unusual with him. In that strange little household in Bolt Court, which good old Dr. Johnson was pleased to call his own, we remember the cat Hodge as a most important member, and certainly the one dearest to his master's heart; and Newton, the prince of natural philosophers, must have possessed a couple of these animals, and have taken pains for their accommodation; for is he not accused of cutting one large hole in his door for the cat and a smaller one for the kitten?

This fancy for the feline race prevails among lesser men. A reverend gentleman of our acquaintance has collected a large number of their photographs, and delights in them as he would in a gallery of

court beauties; another finds no subject of conversation so engaging as the pranks and peculiarities of his six gray mousers at home; and a third confesses to listening at night to the fitful caterwauling under his window as he would listen to a nightingale. About twenty years ago there resided in Boston a Frenchman by the name of Malignon, a gentleman of scholarly tastes, and successful as a teacher of his native tongue. Some of our readers will remember the family of cats, varying from four to nine in number, which shared his bachelor lodgings, and were trained by him to the strictest obedience. They answered to their several names; and at meal-times they sat at a table of their own, each in her own chair, with an allowance of meat placed ready on the plate before her. This was never to be touched without permission from the master; and the expressions on their whiskered faces, as they eagerly watched for his signal to begin, can never be forgotten by those who saw the droll assemblage at dinner. He was proud to exhibit his *protégées* to curious visitors; and when a rise in copper stocks endowed him at

length with a fortune, and sent him home to enjoy it among his friends, he took his favorites with him, we may be sure, to confer upon them the benefits of the best Parisian training.

To any one who carefully observes the peculiar traits of their nature, cats present many strange contradictions. We think of them, first, as dainty Sybarites, loving their ease above all things, and finding it only where material comforts and domestic quiet abound. In cushioned arm-chairs or upon warm hearth-rugs they doze away their days, blinking out through half-shut eyes upon the well-ordered surroundings, with a look of measureless content, and expressing their rapture in that purring noise which we have come to regard as the very language of satisfaction, too happy and too indolent to think.

Yet under this delicate living, this soft, sleepy existence in cosey parlors, there lurks an irreclaimable fierceness, which allies them directly with the untamed denizens of the forest. White, of Selbourne, keen as he is in observation and temperate in language, refers to the house cat as a

"cruel and sanguinary beast;" and his epithets fitly characterize her kith and kin. Although naturalists tell us that they can never have been wild, we do not doubt that they are own cousins to the tiger; and their green, slitted eyes, when lit up in anger with scintillating gleams, seem made to glare out from thickets and jungles upon unwary, defenceless creatures. Their light, stealthy tread and quickness of spring, their fondness for strategy, and unwearying patience, are family traits of all beasts of prey. If by day they succumb to the charms of civilization, darkness arouses them to the savage delights of a free and barbarous life. The shining hours may be given to silent, luxurious siestas; but night is sacred to predatory warfare and heroic serenades. In the still moonlight, while beasts and birds and men are, for the most part, sunk in slumber, they betake themselves to wild marauding over vine-trellises and along outlying fences, caterwauling under the stars, and making night hideous with their sonorous variations upon the five vowels of our speech. Sometimes we are privileged to

behold dimly a couple of these champions as they stand, with long-drawn, defiant notes, preparing for the fray, swinging their tails slowly from side to side with an intensity of repressed rage, and flashing their eyes at the confronting foe, till one smothered crescendo explodes in sudden hissing and snarling and a sound of collision, followed by ominous silence. Next morning they appear beside the breakfast-table, waiting as meekly for their saucer of milk as if they had just risen from long and innocent dreams; and stretching their claws languidly upon the carpet, to imply that the velvet paws that cover them have known no rougher exercise than creeping in and out among the dishes of the china closet. And though they wear the scars of honorable warfare upon their fronts, they never parade them to human eyes; for these contests with the swaggerers and bullies of their race appear to them too sacred to be hinted at to unsympathizing man.

This wonderful mixture of the Sybarite and the savage seems inherent to their character; and yet we see in the kitten no trace of any but endearing

qualities. With her endless devices for killing time and beguiling solitude, her graceful frolics and bewitching mischief, she is the most charming creature in existence. No dreams of rats and mice, midnight prowls and harassing dogs, disturb the saucy serenity of her mind. The staid mamma, coiled stupidly beside the fire, bears no resemblance to the restless little madcap who finds such bewildering fun in chasing her tail and in twitching at the curtain tassels, and who only employs the rare strategic qualities she possesses in pouncing upon the floating shadow of a vine leaf from an ambush of garden rose-bushes.

But the most positive hates and likings will soon begin to assert themselves. If cats inherit, for their æsthetic tastes, a fondness for quiet, warmth, and soft cushions, their material loves are fish, birds, and catnip. In giving them an appetite for whatever swims the briny deep, nature seems to have perpetrated upon them a sly joke; for their inveterate aversion to that element prevents them from obtaining a single fish for themselves. Unluckily, they are more successful in their quest for birds;

and though they are not to blame for regarding the little songsters on the summer boughs as only so many possible breakfasts, we find it hard to forgive the sly-faced old grimalkin who comes stalking up from the garden shrubbery with the approving unction of a saint, while a bereft mother in the tree-top sends out her despairing cry. Fish and birds may be to them delicious eating, but their joy in devouring catnip is something hilarious. The most demure and respectable tabby will tumble about in the fragrant weed in uncontrollable ecstasy, not only her eyes but her whole body rolling in a fine frenzy, showing plainly that its influence has mounted to her brain, and that she is half-seas-over in drunken joy. It is the elixir of the gods to her, as fairly intoxicating as wine or hashish to mortal man.

While cats reserve their strongest aversions for rats, dogs, and water, they show little liking for their human companions and protectors. The greyhound may regard his master with devoted love, but the cat looks upon hers in no such sentimental light. She understands that one bond

alone unites them, and that is the hatred of mice common to both. From him she accepts the luxuries of a home, and she rids his cellar of vermin in return; and the accounts are square. Whether petted or persecuted, the favorite of the parlor or the target of roving boys, her race distrust all those about them, and are willing to be distrusted in turn. The Ishmaelites of our city alleys, they reveal by their sneaking run across streets and open lots that their estimate of average human nature is no better than it deserves.

The cat forms strong attachments, but they are to places, not people. She cares not who inhabits the domain, so be it she is left free to roam over her accustomed haunts. If she is removed with the family to a new residence, she quickly finds her way back to the old home, through unfamiliar scenes.

We cannot claim for her any great capacity for mental improvement. There have been learned dogs, and learned pigs even, but never a learned cat. Very few of them can be trained to any feat; though we do not forget the Maltese giant who

prides himself on opening a door, or the other giant at the apothecary's shop, who sits upon the counter ready to bite off the string when the bundles are tied. If we point at anything, the cat remains looking stupidly at our finger; and in the fable, it is her paw that is burnt in raking out the chestnuts for another. On entering a strange house, or attacking a dangerous foe, she displays some forethought by providing for a masterly retreat; but this is almost her only wisdom.

Much is said about her cleanliness; and the persistent washing of face and snowy breast with her moistened paw does indeed show proper regard for a seemly exterior. When we consider, however, that the mouth which furnishes the moisture must also take to itself whatever is removed, this mode of ablution does not recommend itself to our sense of neatness, however necessary she may find it from her unconquerable dislike of water.

But when disposed to condemn some of the habits and propensities of these household companions, we must reflect that we judge them by a human

standard, and allow no virtues but those that suit our prejudices and interest. Were we to write an epitaph for any paragon among them, it would read something like this: "She was a good mouser, lived at peace with the dog, and ate whatever was set before her." Tried by the code of ethics that prevails in the feline world, she might be adjudged as utterly wanting in the qualities of a saint.

The cats we have loved have been few, and their histories eventful; but space would fail us to immortalize them here. We can only hope that they wander now along the interminable fences that bound the Elysian fields, or steal through the dark caverns of Hades disturbed by no sounds of squealing rats or ramping mice. But one brief tribute shall be paid to thee, O matchless Thomas, who still roamest through the Florentine alley by moonlight, betwixt the shadows of towering houses, and by day reclinest, like a young panther, asleep upon the cushions of my lady's lounge. It is with superb condescension, as becomes his regal beauty, that he rises to salute us, and to

make us welcome beside him; for well he knows that the beloved mistress can come no more to greet us, and that we two must be friends for her dear sake.

THE HUMDRUM ASPECT OF LIFE.

THERE are moods of feeling common to us all when we tire of seeing the sun rise so persistently in the east, and when we fancy that if he were to sail up some fine morning from the opposite quarter of the sky, a new charm would be given to existence. System and regularity, which underlie all developments of nature and of life, appear to us then merely grand names for dulness and routine. We cannot but admire the serene certainty with which planets return upon their orbits, for only the nice balancing of forces which this implies can keep the universe from dashing itself to atoms; but it is refreshing, nevertheless, to find a few blazing comets — those rowdies of the skies, as somebody calls them — careering

across these concentric circles with a wild, erratic sweep, which seems to set all laws at defiance. Earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic outbursts, become welcome assurances that the elements are able to break from their leash, and that exceptions and extravagances are yet possible in the earth and the heavens. Fixed constellations that lighted Chaldean shepherds in their midnight watches shine over us unheeded; but we follow with eager gaze the downward plunge of a shooting-star, careless whether it may be a mere trail of flaming gases, or a solid world spinning fast to destruction.

In such moods, the necessary duties of every-day life confer upon it an aspect of hopeless, unvarying routine. Trifling labors oppress us with their steady recurrence, and absorb the best of our golden hours. We long for something hazardous and unexpected; peril, heart-throbs, intensity of emotion, are better than the torpidity, the humdrum, sordid cares to which society dooms us when it offers protection and safety. We contemplate with dismay the inevitable rising at morning and lying down at night, the three regular meals

between, the thousand and one simple labors which make our civilized, comfortable existence little better than an insupportable bore. When the friends of that quaint physician and poet, Sir Samuel Garth, told him he was dying, he replied that he was glad to know it, for he was tired of pulling off his shoes. Forty-nine years had seemed to him full long enough to endure the even tenor of such petty, prosaic acts. The glorious possibilities and infinite scope of life are lost in these small repetitions that support it; as the immortal Iliad has been described to be only a compound of twenty-four alphabetical letters.

Not only do events appear flat and stale, but the people who surround us fail, at such times, to interest or please. Everybody is everybody's copy; our friends themselves seem hardly worth the time it takes to know them. Amid such stupid uniformity we wonder where novelists find their eccentric and peculiar personages. While we read, the characters strike us as life-like and natural; yet we see nowhere their prototypes.

As we grow older, life wears more and more

this humdrum, forbidding aspect. When the animal spirits and the eager hope that once buoyed us up have departed, and no wide resources of thought or enlarged human sympathies have taken their place, we behold around us nothing save a sterile and familiar waste. In childhood we know little of limitations or probabilities; the beings of fable and the scenes of romance entwine themselves with all our fresh realities. Fairyland is as easy to step into as the next field; and if we should meet there Oberon and Titania, they would hardly be worth a stare. In every bean there lies the germ of just such a mighty stalk as that which Jack planted by his mother's cottage door; on any dull morning another ravenous giant may come striding along and snap us up in a twinkling, if we are not spry enough to elude him. In the forest stream our youthful fancy discerns the flutter of Undine's white robe; passing adown leafy aisles, we catch, like Emerson, a glimpse of vanishing dryads; and upon the far horizon of level waves we behold the vast length of the sea-serpent tumbling in the heaving brine. The cer-

tainty of knowledge that comes to dispel this world of illusions is no welcome disenchanter. Dim, hazy forms were fairer to our eyes than the sharp contours that stand out so boldly in cold, clear light. We have stepped behind the stage in life's great wonder-scenes, and behold the creaking machinery, the worn, besmeared canvas, the hempen strings by which the gay puppets perform their dexterous tricks; but we wish ever after that we could have remained before the curtain in open-mouthed amazement to the end of the play.

And not only are individuals forced to surrender their cherished fables, but the world in general is losing, one by one, its dear, time-honored wonders and prodigies. Merciless historians threaten to leave no longer marvellous deeds, remorseless ruffians or unblemished saints. Heroic beatitudes and infamous villanies are reduced by them to the dead level of average human nature. Long ago they convinced us that a wolf never suckled the twin princes of Rome; now we are assured that William Tell was by no means the shot we have supposed him to be, and that Poca-

hontas had little thought of sacrificing herself in romantic fashion for a captive lover. Mr. Froude claims that bluff King Hal was not so precious a rascal as he might have been, despite his murdered wives; and even the traitor Judas finds plausible defenders in these modern days. So our familiar images go tumbling from their pedestals; and we fear that nothing will be left us either to admire or despise in a round and wholesome style.

While deploring a lack of attractive interest in the objects about us, we fondly believe that in distant scenes life still wears the old freshness and glory. Americans fancy that existence is nowhere so cold and unsuggestive as in the midst of new commercial cities and among rough fields and forests. If nightingales only warbled from our moonlit trees, and larks sank carolling into these Western skies, if ruins frowned upon us from beetling cliffs, and legends were written on crumbling stones, our poets might find themes worthy of immortal verse; and yet the world cares only for their strains when they reflect the novel grandeur of scenery, and the new, large life of the place in which they dwell.

Our artists cross the ocean that they may sit down before the sculptured marbles of other lands, and study them for years; and then one of them discovers, in the matchless beauty of the Apollo he has gone so far to copy, the very poise and proud, defiant grace of an Indian warrior, when he stands watching the arrow strike among the distant herd. Our most gifted novelist lamented the narrow bounds and the blank, colorless life of a New England home; but the papers of a Yankee custom-house furnished to him material for a marvellous romance, beside which his transcript of Italian skies and storied fable appears weak and powerless. Our girls fly to Paris, as to an earthly paradise, and are eager to exchange fortune and happiness for the empty title which can never be offered them at home, and which their republican countrywomen were once taught to despise; our young men regard European travel and a course at a German university as the two things needful to complete their perfection. Yet to the land that they leave, and of whose institutions they are so ignorant, a De Tocqueville came, to study laws

and customs that seemed to him of surpassing interest; and it is still from his foreign pages that we learn the spirit and the distinctive features of our public life. The sons of royal princes have hurried here to learn the art of war; other governments send to us special commissioners to inquire into our sanitary commissions and our public schools. Yet these subjects, and all the wonders with which nature has surrounded us, — the vast lakes and rivers, the mighty cataracts, the rolling prairies and untrodden wilderness, the remnants of Indian tribes and the stirring scenes of frontier life, — appear unworthy our thoughts, until we are asked concerning them on the shores of a Swiss lake, or in the streets of a Prussian town. We begin then to suspect that the surroundings which appeared to us trite and commonplace had a meaning and an interest which our minds were too shallow to discern.

In these latter days we have become so thoroughly possessed by the notion that no surprises are possible, that we accept any, when offered, with sceptical disdain. Believing that we had ran-

sacked the natural world, we looked upon the gorilla as an impostor; and only after severe scrutiny of his credentials did we admit him as a new member of the animal kingdom. To the past we still look for remarkable careers and striking incidents; yet no age surpasses ours in stirring, picturesque deeds. Side by side with the most illustrious of its predecessors, this century will show the lack of no grand, significant events, no romantic splendors, no vivid coloring for the page of either historian or poet; while in munificent bequests of private individuals for furthering the public welfare, in wide-spread intelligence, no less than in knowledge and control of material forces, and in daring incursions into the hidden realms of nature, it puts the achievements of all other centuries to shame.

This daily life of ours, which so often appears humdrum and repulsive, would be rich in interest and promise if we knew how to view it aright. It is only the dull vision, the untrained intelligence, that lead us to weary of the present and to question hopelessly the future. A superficial mind

returns from its journeyings feeling that it has exhausted the world, and wears ever after the despondent air of one to whom there can be nothing new under the sun; a Humboldt finds the longest span of human life all too short for his tireless explorations and the great lessons which they teach to his attentive ear. The more we examine what is around and beneath us, the more we find to arrest our thought. A quiet country town, from which probably nearly every inhabitant would have been glad to escape, for a while, to more diverting scenes, could so charm and occupy Thoreau, that he scorned the offer made him to visit the strange regions of remote Brazil. The keen glance that could detect the tropics in our Northern meadows had no reason to roam over the earth in search of marvels. And amid environments that seemed monotonous to less observant eyes, Jane Austen and Mary Mitford found abundant material for that variety of human character, of scenery and incident, that still attracts us to their animated pages.

It is not the poverty of life without, but of

life within, that cramps and oppresses. Education alone confers the charm that clothes everything with radiance, and makes the wilderness of common scenes to blossom as the rose. External change and excitement can furnish us, at best, but poor entertainment and shallow delights. Go wherever we will, we carry with us ourselves; and upon our own inner resources we must everywhere chiefly depend. If they be rich and varied, no outward surroundings can ever seem valueless and dull; we shall then find food for speculation where empty minds would stagnate in a sluggish discontent.

SMOKING.

IF only for the sake of novelty, we should be glad to begin a pleasant bit of complimentary prose in behalf of this favorite, much-belabored pastime. It is so certain at the present day that any one who discourses at all on the theme has his own little preachment to deliver, and his own mode of demonstrating that it does not pay to smoke, that an attempt to answer these repeated assaults would be hailed with grateful surprise by a smoking world. We remember how surely each year Charles Sprague's "Ode to a Cigar" is revived and reprinted, and how fondly it has endeared him to a thousand hearts. Byron indited some warmly appreciative lines in praise of the weed; and its devotees, in consequence, are ready to absolve

him from a score of flagrant sins. And with what sweet, dreamy memories we recall Ik Marvel's "Reveries of a Bachelor," — a book over which young people hung entranced in our school-days and whose charming fancies were woven of no tissues more substantial than the smoke-wreaths curling up from a lighted Havana.

That was indeed a sensible trio, our generation would say, with some tenderness for the diversions of mankind; but the literature of to-day furnishes no disciples of their faith. Bacchanalian stanzas in praise of the flowing bowl are not more obsolete in the writing of modern bards than are laudatory references to the pipe and the cigar. Smoking has come to be hopelessly classed among the petty sins about which noisy, would-be reformers make such ado; and though, from the chief magnates of our nation to the humblest ditch-digger in the fields, it is more than ever cherished as the dearest solace of life, its votaries utter no word in its defence, and do not seem of the class that write for the magazines. They are either too much engrossed in the labor of converting

tobacco into ashes and smoke, or too much stultified by the process, to put in an appearance in print; so the relentless quill-drivers have it all their own way. The smoke from a million upturned mouths ascends steadily to heaven from our homes of ease and culture; but through it their inmates read scathing tirades and sarcastic flings against their beloved pastime without wincing. They will even declare the last attack to be an uncommonly fine thing, as they rise to refill their well-colored meerschaums. Every whiff, say they, dropping back into deep lounging-chairs, may be wafting us straight on to destruction; but at least it is the art of suicide made easy and agreeable.

Though we cannot, with conscience, enter upon any defence of smoking, we can allow it to be the most becoming of sins. The smoker's attitude, when lost in devotion to his cigar, is always one of easy, listless grace; the thin, enwreathing clouds that float before him give softness to his face and dreaminess to his eye; the gay colorings in his attire, which custom allows him only then,

supply warm tints for the picture, and seem to transfer a little of the splendor and indolence of the Orient into Western drawing-rooms. A fear of lingering fumes in the parlor curtains would prevent most housekeepers from looking at the scene in its purely artistic bearings; but we are not of the number. The fragrance of a good cigar, at some reasonable distance, is as grateful to our sense as sacrifice is supposed to be to a heathen god; and this we avow, in order that no woman's abhorrence of an aroma may be supposed to underlie any opinions we shall express. Moreover, the mere fact that smoking is associated only with masculine life would give it an additional beauty in woman's eyes, such as her own employments of netting and embroidery wear to the other sex. But, in spite of every grace that it may claim, we think we express the voice of womankind when we declare earnestly against it.

The spread of this habit during the past few years must be evident to all; and the growing audacity of smokers is such as to call for a strong protest from women, who are the chief suf-

ferers. Once, the presence of ladies was sufficient reason for leaving the cigar unlighted; but now, in a carriage, the occupants of the back seat are expected to inhale fuliginous puffs from their escorts in front; and on a promenade, gentlemen take out their cigar-cases as though a kindly permission were a matter of course. They may condescend to ask if smoking would be objectionable, but the tone and manner admit of but one reply. In street-cars the same aroma floats in from the platform; and upon the crowded sidewalk it is impossible to escape the choking fumes. This growing encroachment upon the domain of others must arise from a belief that the practice is not so objectionable as formerly, and that therefore its indulgence is less of an insult; but the belief is a delusion.

The two objections commonly adduced against smoking are not such as specially affect woman. She knows it to be expensive, to some degree; but so, also, are wines, fast horses, club dinners, Masonic lodges, and most other masculine diversions; and she leaves to smokers the control of their own

finances. That it tends to withdraw a portion of her family from her companionship is certainly a serious evil, as it affects society in general; but she is not disposed to deplore it for her individual sake. Mothers and wives are often quite as glad to see sons and husbands depart for the smoking fraternity at the club or the grocery store, as sons and husbands are to go. This ought not to be; but, so long as the present structure of society gives the majority of men and women so few sympathies and interests in common, each will look upon the absence of the other, in ordinary life, as rather desirable than otherwise.

Woman abhors smoking, then, not because it is expensive, or generally pernicious, but because it seems to her essentially useless, enslaving, and filthy. These are strong adjectives, but they are appropriate here.

Its uselessness makes it appear ridiculous to her mind. Why is it, she asks, that men take such pains to acquire a habit to which instinctive tastes do not lead, and which can be induced only by much nausea and perseverance? We do not find

it necessary to subject ourselves to this troublous experience. Can it be that life is so barren to men of all rational pleasures, that, without this habit attained, they must go walking up and down in vacant misery; and that therefore they deliberately make themselves sick at the start, in order to enslave themselves ever after to one controlling appetite, to establish a steady drain upon their purses, and finally to disgust their friends; and that all this is done in cold blood, with their eyes wide open to the results? If a need of narcotics and stimulants be a part of human nature, as some writers assert, it is then a part of woman's nature; and yet she never suspects that she is laboring at a disadvantage in not spending several hours each day in smoking. That she can acquire the practice, as shown by the example of Cuban ladies, some old countrywomen, and a few artists like George Sand and Rosa Bonheur, only proves that women are very much like men in tastes and habits when they wish and dare to be so. To eat clay and to take snuff can become feminine accomplishments in communities where they are encouraged. We

cannot believe that the wooden individual in short clothes, with hooked nose and protruding chin, who stands beside the door of cigar-stores, leering seductively to passers-by as he points slyly over his shoulder, has any peculiar enticement for the masculine mind in its natural state. Such a mind must agree with us that the practice of smoking is at least entirely unnecessary, and unproductive of good. It does not induce simple rest, but semi-stupefaction; it gives no exercise to body or mind; and as a pleasure it is wholly selfish, since it diffuses no enjoyment to those around, and shuts one in from all share in the conversation and pursuits of others.

Only the absurd notion that it is manly can ever lead boys to strive so pertinaciously to attain the dignity of finishing a long nine, — in other words, of holding between the lips a roll of lighted tobacco-leaves, making a chimney of the mouth by drawing in the smoke at one corner and letting it out at the other, until the whole is consumed. From this influence very few seem to escape. Even Thoreau, the simplest and purest

of men, confesses that the one vice of his youth was smoking dried lily-stems. In his case there was no progression toward nobler triumphs in the same line; this excess was final, and sufficed: but for the ordinary smoker there is a higher and a manlier attainment, — it is the coloring of a meerschaum. The leisure hours of many months are given by him to this profitable employment; and, during the process, the meerschaum is an object of far more tender solicitude than the state of his soul, the favor of the young lady he adores, or the tie of his best cravat.

The enslaving power which this habit possesses is a second reason why woman condemns it so strongly. Her friends will admit its folly, its evil effects, but declare that they have no power to throw it off; or they will resolve to break it, and after a while creep back to it again, excusing it as a cure for toothache or some other fancied ailment, thus revealing the abject servitude which it has wrought. Nothing in her own life leads her to sympathize with this. Resolution and self-control have been instilled into her from her cradle.

"Because I think I cannot, therefore I will," would be the thought to animate her. "I will own no appetite for my master." To submit to such a thraldom, and to acknowledge it without shame, seems the strangest thing of all.

But if there were no other consideration to prejudice woman against the habit, its uncleanliness would suffice. She loves material purity; more than half her labors are voluntary efforts to keep her surroundings, her house, and her clothing daintily sweet and clean. This practice in those about her not only leads to the pollution of the air and the defilement of floors and sidewalks, but, worse than this, it promises to render repulsive the appearance of those she loves. She may suspect that inveterate smoking is gradually robbing their characters of energy and enterprise, blunting the keen alertness of their senses, and subjecting the whole being to a process of slow deterioration; but she knows, every time her eye lights upon their features, that it is despoiling them of all attractive charm. Stained, yellowish teeth, lips brown and parched, hair, beard, and

clothing steeped in stale odors disagreeable to approach, — these certainly are not recommendations to the favor of one who rates cleanliness next to godliness. If she overlooks such results of the filthy habit, it is only because she knows there is something worse. To smoke is bad enough, but to chew is utterly vile and disgusting. Women do not swear, — that privilege is reserved for gods and men; but if gentlemen could hear the emphatic terms in which their fair friends express abhorrence of the latter custom they would be convinced that the female vocabulary has resources of which they had never dreamed.

Such opinions may not be openly avowed; and, indeed, as society is now constituted, gentlemen are not likely to hear the real sentiments of ladies when these differ from their own. While women are so limited in their choice of masculine friends, and so dependent for attentions upon the few they possess, they will not choose to tell these friends that their habits are disgusting; and that the morality they accept and the tastes they indulge would adorn the characters of

amiable savages, and are tolerated merely because such a low range of thought and action is held respectable among men. This may be in their thoughts; but no French philosopher was needed to teach them that words, for their sex, were not intended to express thoughts, but to conceal them. So we suppose the world will go on, one half its people smoking, and the other half despising them for it, or, it may be, forgiving them; but always considering the practice to be an offence against morals and manners.

THE MORALITY OF AMUSEMENTS.

WHEN Macaulay asserts that the English Puritans detested bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bears, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators, he stretches the truth a little, after his intemperate fashion, for the sake of brilliancy and point. It was the devotion of the hated Cavaliers to licentious sports and immoderate merrymaking that led their opponents to condemn all sports and all merrymaking as wiles of the devil, and to declare that he alone could be virtuous who abjured the sound of the fiddle and the May-day dance upon the village green, and contented himself in leisure hours with sitting upon hard benches, in shorn locks and so-

ber garb, singing psalm-tunes lustily through his nose.

This freakish austerity of our ancestors is more to us than a mere item of history, since these views prevailed when our country was settled, and their influence is felt in New England to the present day. Our earnest forefathers founded their new States upon many sterling virtues; but they committed the grave error of ignoring altogether one great element of human nature, — the necessity for recreation and rest. Stern work and equally stern worship were to absorb and satisfy life; holidays and diversions they regarded as fit only for children, to be encouraged by those governments alone which sought to amuse the people while cheating them of their birthrights. Thus, at the very start, all sports were discouraged on religious grounds; and when, soon after, our greatest philosopher spread abroad his Poor-Richard doctrines, by which the turning of an honest penny was taught as the first duty of his countrymen, our national existence was wholly directed to serious, unflagging industries. As a consequence,

we have become an eager, over-ambitious people, pursuing business with a mad fervor, which gives neither time nor relish for the simple gayeties of every hour. In America we never live, but are always getting ready to live; and we postpone our pleasures to some indefinite future when we shall have the means and leisure that are needed for their pursuit. Since the bow is always bent, we should not wonder if its elasticity is well-nigh gone.

It is no longer a moral objection, however, but a growing love of money-making, which prevents us, at the present day, from indulging in the recreation so essential to health and spirits. Time, which has softened the religious asperities inherited from our forefathers, has softened also the unreasonable prejudices which they cherished; so that we have ceased to regard the fine arts with fixed hostility, and to teach their avoidance as a religious duty. Excellence in music, painting, and sculpture we now recognize as one of the chief glories of a people; and our ignorance of their principles and meagre collection of their beauties are lamented as a national calamity. We are striving

to repair the injury done in the past by sending promising artists abroad for advantageous study, by erecting art-museums at home, and by teaching every child in our public schools the elements of drawing and of harmony; for we see in these accomplishments the agencies that can ennoble and purify thought, and rescue our lives from the dead materialism and unspiritual worldliness of the present. Even those churches which but thirty years ago held stained glass and painted ornaments as an abomination, and thought it a crime to allow musical instruments in their choirs, now perforate the architectural fronts of their new meeting-houses for gorgeous oriel windows, and roll out their jubilant hymns above the melodious thunder of a mighty organ. Thus Beauty is no longer stigmatized as the natural enemy of Virtue, but is welcomed as her powerful ally, able to do harm only when repulsed from her true calling, and driven into the service of Vice. The notion that goodness consists chiefly in making ourselves uncomfortable is fast giving way before the spread of intelligence and of individual thought. Active

exertions in the cause of humanity we now hold to be more conducive to spiritual progress than stated fasts, hair shirts, and secret scourgings.

An equally hearty recognition of the value of simple amusements is yet to come. We may not now enact laws against kissing wives on Sunday, nor call starch "the devil's own liquor" because it contributes to the beautifying of clothes, nor christen children with a whole Scripture text, hyphened into a name, but we are not wholly rid of Puritan absurdities. A few unco good people still consider dancing and novels as questionable diversions, at the best, and deem that they advance the cause of virtue when they brand all theatres as nurseries of sin, and do their utmost to keep good and intelligent people away. We can only be thankful that such characters were not consulted in the making of our world; for then lambs would not have been suffered to gambol, kittens to frisk, or birds to wheel and dart in mid-air; but every creature would have moved along in a regular jog-trot style, bent only on the discharge of important errands. All waving

beauty and variety of foliage would have been condemned as useless; and the myriads of many-tinted flowers would have been dispensed with, as a wanton waste of cellular tissue and vegetable dyes, necessary neither for food, raiment, nor shelter. Such minds must contemplate with dismay the increase of fiction-writing at the present time; since they regard Scott, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, not as benefactors of the race, raising by their magic wands scenes of enchantment to refresh the thought, but only as specious servants of the Father of Lies, all the more dangerous for being so attractive. Moral truth and beauty have been embodied in sacred parable; but the bigoted teachers of these latter days will allow no impressive lessons or varied knowledge of life to be conveyed in anything that savors of fanciful invention.

The deepest prejudice still remaining is that against theatres. Those who denounce them most fiercely usually declare that they have never entered one in their lives; but this confession of utter ignorance concerning them, which should be

fatal, one would think, to a correct judgment in the matter, seems meant only to give stronger emphasis to the condemnation. Great and serious objections may properly be made to very many as at present conducted; and we might wish that some power could avail to close them at once; but these objections do not apply to all, nor are they such as the detractors specify. We are told that the dramatic art is essentially an unworthy one; but the estimation of the world, from the earliest times, has placed it side by side with the arts of painting and sculpture, as deserving equal, if not greater honor. While they choose canvas and marble for their materials, this employs the motions and speech of living men; but the aim of both is the same, — to reproduce and idealize nature and life. The great geniuses of every land have esteemed it worthy of their best talents; and very many didactic authors, like Hannah More, Dr. Johnson, Joanna Baillie, and Miss Mitford, have chosen it as their favorite vehicle for conveying moral truths. When it is asserted that the tendency of plays is necessarily vicious, we need only to recall that

effective temperance sermon which Rip Van Winkle has acted nightly for years to sympathetic crowds, none the less effective because he points no spoken moral, and continues to cling to his old ways in the final scene. Such plays as "Dora," "The Ticket-of-Leave Man," "School," and, indeed, the greater part of those that succeed at the best theatres, cannot fail to send every hearer away, not only the happier, but the better for having seen them, with a renewed love of goodness and native worth, and a stronger sympathy for the outcast and the suffering among mankind.

The objection that is made to the private character of performers, if it could be sustained, has properly nothing to do with the case; since we make no inquiries regarding the morals of the sculptor before sitting down to admire his last wonderful group, nor do we refuse to purchase a pair of shoes until convinced that the cobbler leads a virtuous life. We hope, of course, that they are both worthy men, but their habits can in no way concern the strength or beauty of their work. If the acting before us be conscientious and true,

we have no business to pry behind the scenes. There are probably good and bad people in the dramatic as in all other professions; and certainly the many men and women who go nightly from the stage to happy, respectable homes, where they are as much honored for their private virtues as they are admired in public for their talents, may well query whether a readiness to malign and condemn a whole class without discrimination or justice is any proof of the possession of that superior goodness and charity which their detractors claim. Insinuations of this character, once boldly made by a Western clergyman, were nobly rebuked by a letter from Madame Parepa-Rosa, who might well feel that in defending the honor of the dramatic and lyric stage, to which such women as Mrs. Siddons, Ristori, Fanny Kemble, Charlotte Cushman, Jenny Lind, and herself had devoted the best of their lives, she had no unworthy cause to plead.

But all these objections to theatrical representations will be found to vanish entirely, if they are but christened anew. It is the name alone that is

their curse. Those loudest in condemning them will not hesitate to array themselves in ancient garbs to personate an Old Folks' Choir, or to carry on the spectacle of a farmer's kitchen at a public fair; so that acting and costuming cannot be the reprehensible thing. Shorten good plays and call them dialogues, and you shall hear them spoken on the stage at Sabbath-school concerts. Write an opera on Biblical themes and designate it as an oratorio, and it may be performed in our strictest churches. Call a regularly established theatre, even, a museum, and though it be not a whit better than the rest, you shall straightway behold a row of country deacons sitting enraptured on the front seats. Thus we see that while the Puritan objection still clings to the name, the Puritan objection to the substance has passed away. Can we not afford to be honest, and cease to scare ourselves longer with a bugbear whose mask alone is what we detest? Can we not learn that some amusement must be had by young and old, and that by keeping people from that which is in its nature innocent, we may be driving them to diversions that are really sinful?

We must some day recognize the fact that whatever makes men more light-hearted makes them also better; and that happiness not only conduces to health, but destroys, also, many temptations to crime. Then we shall lament that we have so few national holidays, and that so little real recreation seems possible within doors and at home. One of our cities gives proof of her intelligent care by throwing open her principal halls on festive days, that the children may dance and be merry, and by providing those of a larger growth with frequent concerts in the open air. But, as a people, we are chiefly dependent for diversion upon entertainments furnished by societies and individuals for private gain. Of these, theatres are the most attractive; and in spite of all denunciations of bigotry and ignorance, they will always be attended by young and old. The drama in its essence and best estate cannot be regarded as evil; but since in our country it depends entirely for support upon the favor of the people, with no such help from Government as it receives in France and other nations, its actors will play well or ill,

good plays or bad, as the public shall demand. What, then, is the duty of good and intelligent people, — to forsake the theatres altogether, deliver them over to the base and wicked, and thus force them to minister to the lowest tastes; or, by a judicious patronage, which shall encourage what is pure and praiseworthy, and condemn whatever is degrading, induce them to become the moral elevators and teachers of the people? When so much remains to be done before even our favored portion of the world is won over to the love of virtue, we should seize every powerful social influence by which good may be wrought, cleanse and ennoble it, and bring it in as a valiant recruit for our service. That this has been seen and admitted by the majority of sensible people is the reason why, upon our best boards, the simply true and the intellectual, as represented by our finest actors, have ousted the inferior performances which disgrace the name of the drama; and it is the abandonment of minor theatres by the better class of citizens that has allowed them to descend to meretricious spectacles, which have vitiated public

taste, and rendered it possible to introduce to our Puritan cities the worst dances of the Mabille Gardens and the abominations of Offenbach's operatic scenes, and to retain them there amid enthusiastic applause.

When a stage has fallen to such a condition as this, no gradual reform from a counter opinion in the audience can be attempted, and none but our rulers have it in their power to effect a decisive cure. One would think that the city fathers, into whose hands are committed the welfare of their fellow-citizens and the purity of soul of their own sons, would refuse to sanction by license those entertainments the influence of which can only be to debase and pollute. We might wish, for the sake of religion and virtue, that they were worthier of their trusts.

Only an earnest support given to the best actors and the noblest plays can preserve our better theatres from this corruption; and such support would give a stimulus to that really artistic acting which seeks, by simple fidelity to nature, to present illustrations of moral excellence or reproductions of historic scenes.

As we would retain and encourage dancing, but divest it of the late hours, the promiscuous crowd, the unhealthful suppers, that now too often accompany it, and do our best to render it a cheery and delightful exercise, so should we sustain our drama, condemning and expurgating all coarse language and unworthy scenes, as wrong wherever witnessed, and committing it by such means to the service of the good and the true. Frivolity and extravagant dress are not its necessary accompaniments; nor is it impossible to begin its representations at the early hour of seven, which is still the custom in Germany, and thus prevent it from encroaching upon the domain of required sleep. We shall be wise to save the good wheat, and scatter the chaff to the winnowing winds.

DUDS.

BY this irreverent term we designate those personal effects and belongings which are retained about us when they have ceased to minister to our comfort and happiness. At times, the entire material surroundings of life appear such wearisome incumbrances that we stigmatize them all, without exception, as duds; the garments, houses, books, pictures, which we call our own, seem no longer sources of help and pleasure, but only hampering cares to vex the soul. We wonder then why Nature did not make us like the birds, which flit from clime to clime, taking nothing with them, and leaving nothing behind. Beast and bird are furnished with one perennial suit of fur or feathers, which never requires to be changed;

and this is kept for them in good repair and comfortable condition. When they depart from the den or nest which has been their home, they improvise another abode in the land to which they migrate, without bringing a twig or straw from the old. On their journeys they burden themselves with no supplies, for the wide earth is their foraging ground.

To our race alone a love of property has been given, like a curse; and by it we are made the slaves of our possessions. Wherever we go, there must go also a baggage train. Plato describes a man as a two-legged animal without feathers; but he might have said, with equal truth, that he is the only animal that carries a bundle. It is true, as Horace sings, that black Care sits ever behind the horseman; but it sits there in the shape of a roll of blankets or a leather valise.

There is something derogatory to grandeur and dignity, as well as to freedom of movement, in this dependence upon personal effects. The moment a man clutches a carpet-bag, he ceases to be majestic. It is by the opprobrious epithet of "carpet-bagger"

that our Southern brethren express contempt for Yankee residents and hold them up to ridicule. We never picture our heroes as sallying out with umbrella and rubbers; nor did the ancient poets ever describe Jupiter and Apollo as descending Olympus with an extra mantle thrown over their arms. This would imply at once that helpless subjection to the elements, and that distrust of the resources of the future, which belong only to weak mortals. The gods control nature, the brutes trust it; but man must wrest from it, by persistent toil, the bare materials from which to fabricate his needed shelter and supplies.

The more civilization advances, the more do duds increase. Adam and Eve, departing from Paradise, were probably the only couple ever privileged to move without luggage. Semi-barbarous races, like Bedouin Arabs and all nomadic tribes, are ready to pull up stakes on any fine morning, and start off for "pastures new." They have not yet bartered freedom and light hearts for a mass of cumbersome belongings. But in our social centres, where skilled artisans are ever at

work, man finds himself more and more weighed down and clogged by this rubbish of conveniences; so that he is really bound, like a serf, to the soil upon which he lives. The Romans hit the right word when they called all luggage *impedimenta*, — hindrances, impediments.

Yet it is the chief aim of every one to add to his possessions; and his worth and influence are made wholly dependent upon their number. What he is, is nothing; it is what he has that tells. The poet who declared that man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long, must have been writing of a remote past, and that, too, with all the imagination and license of his race.

If this be true, — that duds increase with the progress of arts and general culture, — the size of trunks in use among a people may become no unfair test of their advancement in material civilization. Our grandmothers knew nothing of the Saratoga cottages that crowd baggage cars on our summer trains: our grandchildren will probably compress their itinerant effects into vast mansions of leather,

beside which they themselves shall look like travellers from Liliput.

If any one wishes to realize the quantity of worldly goods that have accumulated about him, let him proceed to change his abode. Then not only serviceable articles appall him with their number, but all antiquated duds emerge from their forgotten retreats, huge, numberless, irrepressible, and seeming to demand the baggage-wagons of Xerxes' army for their transportation. His lares and penates he would gladly bear away from the forsaken dwelling; but he despairs of reaching the new Lavinium with this chaotic mass of useless rubbish. The whole together he would sell for a song; but with each particular object he is unwilling to part. So they all go off together; and he fancies them jolting along upon the highway to the refrain "Blessed be nothing, blessed be nothing." When he sits down within doors again, on his recovered bales and boxes, he will be likely to meditate the writing of a tragedy in five impressive acts, in which, with all due regard to the unities, and perhaps an ancient chorus thrown in, he

shall carry the heroine along through a succession of misfortunes till her ill luck culminates in the affliction of having to move. His heart will then go out with pity toward all Methodist ministers, who are doomed to migrate every three years with the entire paraphernalia of a modern household. He can only hope that they realize on the start that it can never be theirs to plant a terribly fixed foot on any part of this rolling planet, and thus keep their wings always atilt for the expected flight, and that they also learn in time to resist the tendency which duds have to gather about a householder, like steel filings about a magnet.

In old dwelling-houses, duds, properly so called, have their rightful domain. We consecrate the upper story to these relics of a vanished past; and it is indeed their garret, their place of refuge, their last retreat. There, beneath silent eaves, overhung by no tapestries save those spun by Arachne, and resting upon the soft carpets that are dropped, flake by flake, from the viewless air, they spend a quiet old age, untroubled by the world below. From the splendors of the first floor, to which they

came in fresh beauty, to adorn parlor and boudoir, they have gradually passed to higher and narrower apartments, bringing to upper regions the fashions that have fled; and now, worn out and useless, they reach at length that final hospital set apart for the maimed and crippled of their race. There congregate the stately chairs, lame of a leg and weak in the back, whose sprays of worn embroideries grew and blossomed under young fingers that have long been motionless and forgotten; there gleam the tarnished mirrors, over whose bevelled, lustrous squares have flitted the portraits of departed squires and dames; there rise the tall andirons, behind whose glittering brass once leaped the warm flames and dropped the clinking coals; there rust out at last the tin kitchens that shall never open again toward blazing fireplaces, with a Christmas turkey sputtering within, as we remember them in our young and hungry days.

We cannot but regard with a certain tenderness these dumb material servitors that have ministered to our comfort. For years, perhaps, they served us well, and contributed no small portion

to the sum of our daily happiness. By long association with us they have almost become a part of our individuality; and their remembered forms have interwoven themselves with many a dream and fancy of the brain. And, indeed, any biography of ourselves which should fail to devote a chapter to a certain faithful old shawl, or to furnish reminiscences of treasured garments that have figured prominently in our history, would seem to us too unreal and fragmentary for a correct portraiture.

Gratitude suggests that such garments, in their old age, should be cared for and cherished like disabled slaves. It is doleful to see them at the doors of second-hand clothing stores, dangling like lank spectres of departed glory, or swinging from lofty hooks, like lynched culprits from a tree-bough. How flabby and characterless looks the little blue boddice, beating about in the morning wind! We fancy that its sleeves were fitted to plump white arms, and that it was a fair young throat that rose first above those ruffles and frills. And it must have been a pretty face that looked

out under that coquettish hat lying behind the dirty window, with its faded flowers still rising jauntily above the crown. Are their former owners moving in higher scenes, while casting off these outworn fineries for less favored sisters to shine in for a brief hour, or have they sunk into poverty and wretchedness, pawning their scanty possessions for the means to support life? We will trust that they are disporting themselves in braver and fresher attire, while these shabby garments swing and dangle drearily in the east wind, which shows little respect for their early history, whatever it may have been.

Duds seem at all times a satire on the past. Limp, faded, and useless, they are the sole relics of our departed joys, our scenes of pride and triumph. We strive to recall the hours of social delight, when life was filled to the brim with rosy wine, but can only vainly ask, with Hans Breitmann, Where is that party now? The soiled gloves, the torn laces, have survived it, and are the only things that live to tell the tale. The external has proved the one part of the scene that is

substantial and enduring. We would rather wish that memories alone, dim and evanescent though they be, should suggest the vanished beauty of the past; we desire no visible and mocking reminders of what we have lost. Lethe is pleasanter to contemplate than Limbo.

But annihilation, even of earthly substance, is no easy process. We look forward to the day when skilful mechanics shall construct furniture of such well-matched material that, like the deacon's shay, all parts shall give out together, and leave no battered fragments to be housed and protected for years. Then every splinter shall be resolved at once into its component elements. Our modern houses prefigure such a condition of things when they contain no unfinished attics for the retention of cast-off rubbish. Give to the flames or to the poor whatever you do not use, is the wisdom they enforce.

It is not individuals alone who hoard remains of departed usefulness; the State has also its duds laid away in halls and archives, and our Antiquarian and Historical Societies are formed that they

may be collected and preserved. No magician can recall the past; but the trappings and furnishings it has left behind, the armor of its heroes, the robes of its monarchs, the coin of its kingdoms, the obsolete laws of its codes, — all remaining fossils from which the spirit has forever fled, may be snatched awhile from oblivion, that by their help historians may produce a truer semblance of that olden time. Fortunately for us, America inherits but a small portion of that cumbrous legacy of unmeaning customs and effete institutions which impedes the progress of so many nations.

Although outward adornments may seem the only survivors of scenes in which they bore a part, — like empty flagons left behind when their rich, sweet contents have long evaporated, — they are really the one perishable element of past events. It is the things that are seen that are temporal, "the things that are unseen are eternal." Our memories, our thoughts, ourselves, are the result of all those vanished influences, and outlive the changing shapes of time. The soul is the only real part of us; all things else are foreign and

transient. It borrows from this planet, body, clothing, and a dwelling; and departing leaves them all behind, and journeys on, alone and naked, toward enduring mansions that are not made with hands.

BOSTON COMMON ON A SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON.

CLEAR autumn sunshine sifts down through the yellowing elm-leaves of the Common, and lies softly quivering upon the paths, as we come in from the noisy street to indulge a quiet reverie under swaying boughs. Two summer months have come and gone since we took our last stroll along these leafy colonnades; and though wider and wilder landscapes have revealed their charms to us since then, we are not sorry to exchange them all for a sight of this pleasant spot. Our wanderings have disclosed no fairer view than these vistas of sunlit avenues, this low-hung, verdurous canopy under which we move, this level greensward streaked with the shadows of tree-boles and warm

with the radiance of a bright September afternoon. We note their trim beauties with fresh delight as we leave the edge of the pond and climb up the sloping path to our favorite seat on the highest mall. Not far beyond us stretch the ungainly branches of the gingko-tree; and its finely veined, fan-like leaves give a soft flutter as we approach. It is a stir of surprise and welcome, for the gingko-tree knows us well, and we are glad to see each other again. Here, then, we will sit, undisturbed by the life and hurry that we passed just now in the lower paths, — the strangers and children staring in at the deer, the throng coming up from the Providence Depot, boys kicking football, and tanned old apple-women dozing beside their tables, the blind beggar croaking dolorous songs, a big telescope pointed heavenward, men with "dorgs" dripping from a plunge into the pond, the near rattle of horse-cars and rumble of drays. To this retired spot the nurses come to wheel their little chaises; now and then a newsboy offers his paper in insinuating tones to the loungers on the seats, and the merry tone of a hand-organ comes up from the side street in faint tinkles of sound.

It is plain that summer days have flown. Soft afternoon sunshine strikes up the high bank opposite, and broken shadows from the tree-tops sway and float across it; but the light does not burn, and the shadows are less dense than those of June. Over the hard sand before us skurries a little troop of fallen leaves, breaking suddenly into mad whirls and waltzes, as they begin to realize their strange freedom from parent boughs. They graze lightly along in their airy pirouettes; but it is a dance of death, and reminds us of the hoar-frost and snow-flakes that shall come to cover withered heaps huddled by the wayside. Two or three yellow butterflies still go wavering over the faded turf, searching, perhaps, for a fresh clover-top; and a clumsy, mumbling bee clings upside down to a grass-blade, as if doing his best to commit suicide by hanging. Ah, poor little rovers, no more sweet honey-draughts welling up in the flower-horns for you! Hasten away across these grassy spaces to a broad, low garden, for there you shall find some remnants of midsummer glories left, and drain your last beaker before you die!

We miss the chirp of the robins, and the squirrels that leaped from the tree-boles, and tilted, with motions quicker than sight, over the ground. Already these children of the summer have found out what our chill mornings and cooler suns mean, and are making ready for the inevitable change. We miss, too, the tall booth draped in forlorn blue cambric, within which Punch and Judy were wont to enact for us their little domestic tragedy. Evidently they have departed from our Common, followed, let us hope, by a long train of sorrowing urchins, who were there to bid them a last and tearful good-by. They reminded us, somehow, of pretty Mignon and Italy, of gypsies and strolling players, of English fairs and merry-makings; and now they have fled. No more do we stand among crowds of silent newsboys and country youths to see that swaggering little ruffian browbeat and abuse the meek and suffering Judy; no more is our soul racked with torture as he swings her from the scaffold, and pommels her into her tiny coffin. We had never the heart to loiter after that cruel scene; and now we may not learn the

vengeance of the last act, nor what pangs of remorse seized her unprincipled lord.

We mourn departed joys; but yet, surely, these are not "the melancholy days, the saddest of the year." The sunlight flooding the bank and lighting up the stately house-fronts that rise beyond the iron paling looks marvellously soft and delightsome. Tendrils of woodbine glisten in it, thick and green, as they dangle from the balconies; beneath them tall bushes of the Rose of Sharon lift their crimson-petalled blooms. Closed casements tell of families still lingering in country homes; but up and down the long street we see many windows open to the sun, and behind their rose-tinted panes appear the shapely heads of little ladies bending over their tasks. We behold them dimly, but have no doubt that they are all young and beautiful, and that they bend to read some poet's musical strophe, or to weave silken presents for absent lovers. Occasionally they glance up to survey the world outside their bowers of brick and stone; but no one of them discovers the wrinkled crone that sits under a tree of the Common, drop-

ping her crutch as she wipes her spectacles for a clearer gaze.

Nearer objects divert our sight; for along the street that lies between us and the house-fronts begin to roll many gay equipages, on their way to the breezy Milldam and the sunny fields beyond. Here a great family coach containing two portly dowagers is slowly descending the hill; and just behind it a pretty damsel sits alone in her basket phaeton, holding the reins somewhat nervously, and looking out sharply for colliding hubs. Soon there dashes past them a gay little wagon with glancing wheels, and a proud young Adonis for a charioteer. Now Miss McFlimsey's carriage comes into view; and we behold that estimable lady sinking back on high cushions, with a pet spaniel beside her, and a coachman as big as one of King Frederick's grenadiers, sitting, bolt upright and terrible, on the seat before. Everybody, indeed, is starting off for the afternoon drive. It is the right hour; and but for one little circumstance we should hasten to join that festive throng, and the circumstance is this, — that the horses which fit

our harnesses still roam in proud freedom over South American pampas, and no lasso can entrap those mettlesome steeds. So it is our pleasure to sit here under the trees, and watch, in dreaming mood, the empty barouche standing at the mansion opposite, with a tall Jehu decorating the front seat, and the smallest of small boys clinging boldly beside him. We are sure that some vastly fine lady is to take her airing within it, since it waits so long for her coming; but no, it is a fine old gentleman, instead, that mounts the step, with much aid from man-servants, and much wrapping of the foot that he stretches on the seat before him. Then, when all is done, a little damsel comes to sit beside him, and a fair-haired youth, of brave and noble bearing, pleasant to behold, takes the opposite corner, sitting well off from the invalid foot. We know them to be the dear child Ethel Newcome and Cousin Clive, bent upon an hour's pleasuring under bright skies; and we rejoice that Lady Kew is unable to accompany them to-day, and that this bland old gentleman has taken her place. Now Ethel adjusts her parasol, the tall

Jehu gathers in the ribbons, the small boy clutches the seat railing, and the equipage wheels around and vanishes from sight.

Then we turn to take a last gaze over the greensward behind us, sloping down and away till it seems to meet the drooping boughs. After all, there is no scene so pleasant as this. A distant elm-tree, steeped in amber hues before its time, stretches out between greener boughs, like a golden radiance. Tripping beneath this canopy, with drops of light flitting over her as she moves, a red-shawled maiden gives to the mellow landscape that charm of contrasting color which painters love. If the great Brewer Fountain, just visible beyond, were really a fountain, and not a towering structure of bronze, it should be playing to-day, and spouting columns of plashing drops over Neptune and his naiad queens; but these water-loving deities have long sat high and dry upon their pedestal, and the little cherubs above are faint with protracted thirst. The great jet in the pond is a fairer sight to see, when it sends up its torrent of sparkling diamonds; but that, too, is still, and a

gentle breeze scarcely ruffles the shallow water around it. Sometimes, when a strong wind tosses the boughs overhead, we watch the wavelets blow like dark shadows across the surface of the pond; and at evening golden quivering lights stream down into its depths, and then we always believe the pond to be fathoms deep, with schools of strange fish stemming its undercurrents, and several respectable mermaids sitting far below, at doors of sea-green caverns, engaged in combing their dripping locks.

Yes, whether in wind or calm, morning or evening, we like this verdurous Common. Bostonians are proverbially silent concerning its merits, as they are of all their possessions, and are given to a needless undervaluing of the town in which they dwell; but no false modesty prevents us from declaring that every sandy path and worm-eaten branch of this place remains dear to our heart. No newer park will ever rival its attractions. The Public Garden is prettier, but it is laid out for display and nice effects, and seems copying the beauties of older and finer pleasure-grounds. Nevertheless,

we would not disparage the Garden unduly. With its parterres, its vases of trailing plants, its seats embowered in shrubbery, its statues and fountains, it is a fit place for cheerful rambles, and appears made for the sauntering of happy lovers. We may always encounter there scores of smiling couples, who apparently find it not unpleasant to be young, to have a beau, and to walk there on moony nights. Though one of the two is smoking a villanous meerschaum, we can see that he is not concerned just now about the probable price per foot of the land on which he treads, nor whether the neighboring houses are built with subcellars; and the other is plainly of opinion that she is gazing upon a midsummer moonlight in Arcady.

We go there sometimes at early evening to see Venice; for, like the Marchioness, we have been endowed with the gift of making believe; and, standing upon the edge of the lake, we see before us a dark canal, shadowed by oozy palace-walls. The tiny boats at the farther end of the lake are gliding gondolas, and their boatmen lithe and

swarthy gondoliers, who have just ceased singing to noble travellers the songs of Tasso. We hear the faint echoes still reverberating under the dark arch of the "Bridge of Size." Or we turn away from the water view to behold only the little temple, the statues, the tangled parterres, the flower-lined paths; and then it is some charming garden of Paris. Beyond it rises the forest of Fontainebleau, and the dome of the Hôtel des Invalides. We have not the slightest idea whether the hotel and the aforesaid forest are within a dozen miles of each other, but that does not trouble us in the least.

However, one is not always disposed to make believe, and in soberer moods we prefer the plain, unpretending Common. Here we come to dream in quiet, as we have to-day, waiting till the last glimpse of sunlight has left the tree-tops, before we dismiss all idle fancies and go home to a late supper.

THE SELECTION OF GIFTS.

HOWEVER familiar we may be with the needs and fancies of our friends, it is never an easy thing to choose the objects that shall be sure to please their tastes. Commerce may have brought the handiwork of many nations, the products of every clime, to spread before us for our choice, and yet we find among their treasures nothing that will seem desirable to all. Books are an enduring and ennobling pleasure; but who shall select reading for any mind, knowing not what it has nor what it longs for? Pictures open in the blank wall vistas of inaccessible beauty, — dim forest glades or sunlit ruins, wild stretches of moorland overhung with clouds, or warm clumps of garden bloom, where butterflies flit and bees wander on unending errands; but we can-

not give the eye that is fitted to comprehend their glories, and if that be wanting, the color will be spread in vain.

To ladies, with their love of the niceties of art, and their catholic taste for beauty in all its forms, we feel sure that anything which is finished and exquisite will give delight, though it may possess no other excellence. If we have a fancy for making our mankind ridiculous, we can provide them with gorgeously flowered dressing-gowns, in which they may array themselves of an evening like Persian bashaws, can set their feet in slippers of defiant hues and pronounced design, and drop over their heads tasselled smoking-caps, and thus do our prettiest to convert them into harlequins. Or we may knit for them immense scarfs, whose ends of bright fringes flapping over their shoulders shall proclaim them to the world as somebody's darling. Beyond this we are powerless; their wants are few and well supplied, their tastes are positive, and we may not hope to satisfy them.

Of late years the world has busied itself with providing entertainment for children; but since

every object with which the minds of little people come in contact is an element in their education, we should endeavor even in their toys to benefit as well as amuse, to set their wits to work in some profitable manner, or to train their physical powers by active games. At least, let us see that our gifts do not prove deleterious to their health or distracting to those about them. Children have two dominant passions, — a love of candy and a love of noise; but it is quite possible to furnish them with the gayest sport without indulging either, without making them sick with bonbons or driving the neighborhood frantic with tin trumpets and drums. Even at their early age it may be well to learn a wholesome respect for the rights of others.

There are presents which we make to erase some claim of indeterminate value, or to discharge gracefully a debt not acknowledged as such; but these have no right to the name whose pleasant sound they borrow. The primal object of any real present is, of course, to convey an assurance of affection. Independently of its inherent worth,

a gift from a loving friend will be precious simply because it is a gift, because we know by it that another has thought of us, has wished to please us, has made some sacrifice of time and money to do so. Words may have said as much as this before, and found ready belief; but there is no word so eloquent as a deed, no emphasis that language can receive equal to a corresponding act.

But though any gift is a kindly message sent from friend to friend, its meaning becomes stronger and sweeter with the time and thought that have been given to its preparation. A gewgaw from a shop-window will prove to us that we have been remembered, but its purchase may have been the impulse of a moment; a piece of workmanship over which the eyes we love have dropped with tender glances, over which dear fingers have flitted and busied themselves hour after hour, possesses a far greater charm; it tells of many dreams in which a thought of ourselves has been uppermost, of many bright imaginings with which another's fancy has been wreathing

our name. Above the visible beauty of its woven fabric is wrought this airy arabesque of kind remembrance, more lovely and acceptable than the richest woof that may glow beneath.

We desire that the gift we tender shall have some positive worth of its own, lest, if it be paltry, we may appear to overrate the charm of our association with it, or else to hold in light esteem the friendship of which it is a token. Its value, however, should never be excessive, whatever the means of the giver; for then it would seem to say, "Now, my good friend, I hold you at a disadvantage; you have become my debtor;" and it is both natural and right that lovers even should prefer to keep their accounts well balanced, and to maintain a feeling of equality. Whatever the worth, we feel that our gift must never be merely useful, but appear by some grace or beauty of its own to minister to the finer tastes of our friend. Otherwise we shall seem to be supplying his wants and conferring upon him a charity.

The fondest heart will hold no offering complete and appropriate which does not comprise all

possible merits. However beautiful in themselves, love is solicitous that its precious tokens shall also be difficult to obtain, enduring in their beauty, associated with some place remote and famous, and, if possible, such as will benefit as well as charm.

The flower that sprung by our own doorstep would be hardly worth our acceptance; but if its fellow were brought to us from the heart of a bog, by adventurous feet and eager hands, we should receive the trifle as if it were a treasure. Not easily attainable, it would possess one element of value beyond its own worth, while it would lack another charm, — that of endurance. Nothing that we can present is so lovely as flowers, but nothing is so fleeting. The bountiful hand that flings them over the earth need never be empty, and can renew them faster than they fade; but we would wish our meagre bounties to be lasting, since we have so few to bestow.

An association with foreign scenes will render a gift most precious and welcome which otherwise were worthless. It may be a dry little leaf that

drops out of the letter; but when we learn that it hung and fluttered a few weeks ago above Virgil's tomb, that its shadow wandered, beneath the soft Italian sunlight, over the time-honored stones, and that under the cool fragrance of its parent branches dusty peasants rested just outside the beautiful city, we refuse to rate its price in silver and gold. A tiny bottle of red sand is a sorry and useless thing in itself; but if we know that its contents were scooped up from the wastes of an African desert, beneath the feet of weary camels, and that in the wrath of fierce simooms its grains may have whirled around the corners of the Pyramids, or blown into the eyes of the very Sphinx, we will tell you to carry off our whole sea-beach, but to spare us that. The Kenilworth ivy at your window trembles now only to the canary's song; but it grew from a stalk against which may have swept the train of Queen Bess herself, as she rustled her brocade down Leicester's garden alleys, flirting with the lavish Duke while they sauntered on toward some fresh out-door revel. They tell us that Shakspeare may have been there, a

boy of twelve or so; and we are sure the bright-eyed little lad took note of the pretty vine swinging and swaying from the castle wall, if it had any beauty in those days. And poor Amy Robsart—her story is written on those eloquent leaves. The traveller who brought to you that little branch of green brought you also more dreams and fancies than you ever thanked him for.

And when, from over the waves, in trunks that have outlived all perils by sea and land, there come to remembered friends green, cloudy malachites from Russia, pink corals from Naples, wood-carvings from Switzerland, and all marvels of nice workmanship from Paris, what charm or value do they lack? They combine all excellences that any gift can possess; and so long as they shall endure in their rare beauty, they will bear witness how much the worth of a gift may be enhanced by its associations, and by the thought that in foreign scenes, amid jostling crowds and strange faces, warm hearts have not forgotten those who were left behind.

No present is so perfect but it may receive an

added grace from the manner in which it is bestowed. That royal Cyrus of whom Xenophon tells such fine things knew better than any other how much depends on this art of putting a case. He sends a remnant of his dinner to some general of his army; and the half-eaten goose, which by a clumsy speech would have been made an insult, — an offering of cold victuals, indeed, — becomes by his message a token of courtliest favor. And this is what he says: "Cyrus hath tasted of this and hath found it excellent, and he desires that you may enjoy it also." The giver would always wish to tender his offering by any hand but his own, that he may not seem ready for the gratitude of his friend, who, in his first surprise and pleasure, may have no fitting word to express his thanks. Presentations made in public, with the necessity for a speech in reply, if the gift be genuine and unexpected, appear to be a refinement of torture, which only our fondness for speech-making can lead us to tolerate.

A truer feeling teaches us to gather together our Christmas presents for children and to offer

them in any fictitious name. It is Santa Claus who bears them in, on still, cold nights, hitching his team of prancing reindeers to the chimney-tops while he descends with his store. And we obtain his presence, in mask and fur wrappings, to distribute his treasures one by one from the boughs of a glittering tree; or we allow dimpled fingers at early daylight to pluck their own out of the stockings which were hung open and ready the night before. And there is nobody to thank; for the strange little fellow who brought them all has whisked himself off in a twinkling, and is never seen more. From what far wonder-land they were transported in that swift sledge of his, no one cares to inquire.

O happy time of absurdity and romance, how gladly would we surrender the hard knowledge of later years if we could believe in your sweet nonsense once more!

"GOOD-WILL TOWARDS MEN."

IT was a grand, sweet song that the angels sung over that little Roman province eighteen hundred years ago. The import of its gracious words must have startled the ears of all who heard them, for they proclaimed a doctrine new to mankind.

"War on earth, good-will only towards my citizens," had been the message carried by Rome's imperial eagles to all beyond her borders. Her hostile legions had marched victorious into every land, and still held the nations subject by the strong arm of conquest. Thus had she gained this remote corner of her domain, over whose plains, on that first Christmas morning, rang out the strange melody, — "Peace on earth, good-will towards men." A brotherhood of all people, a union of all

interests, was the prophecy it spoke; and the Child who lay there in his unhonored cradle had come upon earth that its fulfilment might be possible in the far future of the world.

Two thousand years have nearly passed since then, and we have yet to learn the meaning of this song. From the divine teachings which it heralded have flowed the blessings of European and American civilization; but the existence of a universal brotherly love among mankind, which those teachings must ultimately produce, is still a dream and a chimera. Premonitions of such a feeling have come, like an inspiration, to few. Already, in that ancient empire, one mind, and one alone, had looked beyond the confines of its selfishness; and those sublime words of Terence — "I am a man and feel for all mankind" — still shine forth above the narrow self-seeking of our time. They found no echo in the hearts of his countrymen, they find scarcely any in ours.

We love those who are near to us; we love our State; in times of national peril we find swelling up in our bosoms a love for our country: but

here philanthropy ends. Patriotism is the utmost bound of our affection; and to us, as to the Romans, all beyond our limits are barbarians. We treat them with more consideration; for no nation is now mighty enough to domineer haughtily over others. We deal with antagonists who are equal to us in strength; and the greater courtesy of our bearing is due rather to a respect for the number and range of our neighbor's cannon than to any increase of good-will. Intercourse with foreign governments is chiefly concerned with disputes and differences; and we choose for Secretaries of State and diplomatic representatives the men who possess the art of calling other powers thieves and robbers with the most serene and suave urbanity. We may bandy grand compliments, but we still keep a hand upon the sword-hilt.

Our own country, the youngest and noblest of all, has ever opened wide her doors to the crowded nations of the earth; but she extends no hand of fellowship to those who remain at home beyond the seas. Foreigners must step for aye upon her

shores to obtain from her good-will and protection; and even now she is half ready to retract her former welcome, and to close her gates in the face of a great people, should her interests seem to demand it. The Roman playwright can still teach us love for mankind; and the Greek Socrates shames our narrow patriotisms with his noble declaration, "The whole world is my country."

And yet slowly and steadily, as the ages roll away, we may discover growing up a code of international law, founded upon the broad basis of justice peacefully conceded to all; and the vision of a congress of nations, to whose wise and firm arbitrament all lands shall habitually look for the redress of wrongs and the adjustment of disputes which now each one must right and settle for itself with the sword, comes with stronger force to the few who look beyond the wars and tumults of our day to a final reign of peace on earth. Already one such assembly has been called to adjudicate the rival claims of two of the greatest powers of the earth; and we have seen its decisions accepted as final and obligatory. Such a fact

as the Geneva Congress shows that the world is ripe for the acceptance of a larger and more comprehensive statesmanship than has hitherto dared to display itself at the council-boards of kings. The dreams of the past become the realities of the future; and we may believe that in some good hereafter the swords shall indeed be beaten into pruning-hooks, and nations, like individuals, abandon the creed that it is might which makes right in the world.

Ages, however, must roll away before the first Christmas Carol can be sung as anything but a prophecy. Far from outgrowing the wisdom of that great Teacher whose birth it celebrated, we have scarcely learned the import of the precepts of philanthropy which he uttered eighteen centuries ago.

This is evident not only in the intercourse of nations, but in the relations of individuals and in the common practices of life. The sentiment of good-will towards men must include also our foes; and Christ especially enjoins that we should love our enemies and bless them who persecute us.

But this doctrine seems still too hard for human nature to accept. Few beside Victor Hugo's good bishop attempt to carry out the lesson of turning the other cheek to those who smite us, of going two miles with a man who compels us to go one, of offering our coat to him who has robbed us of our cloak; and we think we have a more effectual way of heaping coals of fire upon an enemy's head than by administering kind words.

Tit for tat was the precept which held sway before this new injunction; and there is still enough of the Feejee Islander in us to delight in its application. Good gifts to our friends, good hard knocks to our enemies, is what we declare to be consistent with dignity and self-respect. Give only what is deserved, do unto others whatever they do unto you; for if you treat your friends as you do your enemies, and love them all, what reward have they more than others? is our perverted version, and we would fain believe it to be the true one. "Stand up for your rights, my boy; do not yield an inch to another's crowding," does not sound much like the texts about the two

miles, the other cheek, and the coat. We pray, like the Jewish king, for confusion upon our foes; and appear to think that the verse "Revenge is sweet, saith the Lord," may be found in the Good Book.

Even the doctrine of forgiving our enemies, so much easier to practise than that of loving them, is regarded as absurdly generous, — a practice that may be common in the millennium, but hardly to be expected of ordinary mortals at the present time. A prostrate enemy we could forgive; we would not drag a dead Hector around the walls; and would even bring tenderly into hospitals the wounded foe from the battle-field. Thus much will our humanity do. But to declare that we had forgiven the injury of an equal or a superior would seem to us a confession of cowardice. Only by showing ourselves sensitive to insults do we think to obtain fair treatment from others.

This doctrine of non-resistance to wrong does, doubtless, presuppose in a man a grand patience, that can calmly wait for the slow adjustments of time, and in his oppressors a susceptibility to gen-

erous conduct that can hardly be said to exist in our present semi-barbarous society.

When, in the progress of time, all men shall learn to uphold the primal articles of the Quaker's creed, it will be possible for us to trust to a true impulse and a tender conscience for the maintenance of individual right; and when citizens shall practise towards each other this noble forbearance, we may look for similar dealing in the intercourse of States.

Far away as such a period appears to us, it must surely come, if truth and goodness are to triumph at last in their contest with wrong and prejudice, and if the words of that Christmas song which rung over the plains of Judæa are to receive their fulfilment upon earth.

OLD-FASHIONED FLOWERS.

GARDENING, like every human pursuit, is subject to the whims of the hour, and renders Nature herself the handmaid of Fashion. Pope's workmen followed the prevailing mode when they lopped the trees at Twickenham into fantastic shapes, and scooped out an artificial grotto for the delight of the rhyming philosopher and his city friends. Years ago we shaped our flower-beds into regular diamonds, circles, and squares, bereft them of every blade of grass, marked their bounds by an edge of pinks or box, and separated them by narrow paved walks that served only as highways for spiders and crickets. Now at length we discover the contrasting beauty of green turf; and, heaping together rich masses of color, we set

them in round parterres in the midst of shaven lawns.

But the plants that bloom there are not the friends of other days, the darlings of our childhood; for those have gone into exile, sent thither to make room for the strange, uncanny faces that display themselves at horticultural fairs, and fill with their heathenish names the catalogues of florists. New favorites find many to praise; but to our eyes no flowers can be as fair as the roses and clove-pinks, the pansies and lilies, that grew in old-fashioned gardens, where syringas and lilacs towered in the corners, and columbines, marigolds, brave London-pride, and ladies'-delights ran riot between. There a bank of ribbon-grass fluttered its stripes of green and silver, each blade of a different pattern; climbing honeysuckles freighted the evening air with perfume; and beside the house-door morning-glories spread wide their fresh, cool tents for a day's entertainment to all roaming bees. No Baltimore Belle or Queen of the Prairie can rival the full, deep-hearted cabbage-roses, as they bloom in our memory, or match the hue of their crimson, single-

leaved sisters, flaming beside them on low stalks. Even the old-maid's-pinks, bursting out sideways beyond all bounds, the pungent southernwood and tansy, and the leathery Aaron's Rod,— transformed into inflatable "toads' backs" by slow pressing betwixt thumb and finger in the days when time was not money, — all wear now the charm which clothes the half-forgotten scenes of childhood.

Many of these flowers, we must think, had a beauty all their own. Hollyhocks have now no friends, neither have sunflowers nor poppies.[1] We are in a mood for nice effects, and must have our blossoms small and exquisite. Nothing is planted nowadays to delight the eye at a distance; no clumps of stalwart sunflowers lift their broad, velvety disks, with halos of golden rays shining far and wide, each upturned flower an enamoured Clytie, gazing after the glowing wheels of the sun. We no longer suffer peonies to blaze abroad with their full crimson petals; nor do we behold, nodding and swinging beyond the garden wall, a

[1] Since this was written, fashion has revived a taste for these long-neglected flowers, and delighted the hearts of their constant admirers.

row of radiant hollyhocks, spiring up into gay minarets, that wave in the light and the breeze and keep hovering about them a cloud of butterflies, humming-birds, and bees. They were favorites of Wordsworth, who had, as Margaret Fuller tells us, a long avenue of them, of all colors, from the common brown to rose, straw-color, and white, and who pleased himself with making his neighbors admire them also. We remember the tall hollyhocks in a certain fine picture, called "The Home of the Bees," and the rich background they make for the sunny hive; only the Danish artist has robbed them of half their beauty by painting them double, so that their petals disclose no shading off of rich hues at the base, but hide completely the clustered stamens rising, like tiny candlesticks, upright and burning, in the centre of their silk-hung halls. In their mania for doubling flowers, gardeners would fain spoil our tulips and lilies, and all bell-shaped, beaker-like forms, whose beauty lies in a hollow cup and graceful filaments. Poppies, too, are under the ban of fashion; but what reigning favorite can show their

glowing varied colors, as they stand nodding together in "such a jocund company," with their crimped petals fringed deep and fine, darkly spotted at their base, and ready at every wind-stir to shower down like flakes of bright snow?

What is to become of that pretty sentimentality, the language of flowers, by which every leaf and blossom sent from a friend seems to bear a secret message to our hearts? The old familiar blossoms are the only ones that have been endowed with this recognized speech. It will be long before amorous lads and lassies can attach tender meanings to a wigelia, or fancy that bashful compliments find expression in a spray of dielytra or a deutzia-bud. These latinized titles smack of books and scholarly disquisitions, and are not such as endear themselves to the common heart. When the taste for tulips shall have died out, not only from Holland but from all lands, and their glowing cups no longer swing over our garden-beds, will a lover pluck a handful of thunbergia to whisper to his mistress that she has beautiful eyes, or utter his incipient passion in gloxinias and gerardias? If

an atmosphere of sentiment and fond association is ever to gather about these strangers, it must be created by that poet of the future who shall be miraculously skilled to make of our prosaic railroads, steamboats, and telegraph-poles worthy themes for a new-born muse.

We ought to rejoice that this fashion in flowers prevails only within yard-palings, and that the fickle goddess can issue no decrees to the denizens of field and wood. Outside the narrow, cultivated domains of which she takes cognizance still flourish the pretty tribes who were contemporary with King Philip and his men, and who knew, doubtless, that elder race which vanished before them. Wild-oats and wind-flowers, pond-lilies and pickerel-weed, are lineal descendants of the blossoms that Indian girls braided into raven tresses centuries ago. No foreign invaders have dispossessed them of their soil, and white face and red man have proved alike to them.

Their names and haunts remain unknown to most of their human neighbors; for few are they who care "to learn the secret of a weed's plain

heart." When field-flowers come repeated in artificial forms from Paris, the votaries of fashion first awaken to their grace and beauty. Then they discover the charm of our wild ox-eyed daisies, the immortelles of modistes, with their white rays set around broad golden hearts, making beautiful the fields which they have overrun to the regret of the haymakers. Bearded wheat, sunny buttercups, and brier roses are found to be passing fair when embodied in painted muslin and nodding from wire stems. Among these French field-flowers that our belles so much affect, three at least seem interlopers to American eyes. We reckon no scarlet poppies among our weeds; but it is in England and France that they sow themselves among the grains, leading Keats to picture Autumn as lying

> "On a half-reaped furrow fast asleep,
> Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
> Spares the next swath, and all its twinèd flowers."

The bachelor's-button clustered with them is the blue corn-flower of other lands, but is not native to our soil. No spade of ours ever turns up the

crimson-tipped daisy over which Burns so sweetly lamented, and we must needs shelter it as a house-plant if we would see it flourish; but English grass is dotted with its modest bloom, as abundant there as the many-rayed dandelion in our transatlantic fields.

It is only because wild-flowers are so common that we are blinded to their charms. We forget that the cherished shrubs and annuals of our gardens are only the weeds of distant countries, and that flowers, like prophets, have no honor in their own land. At home, like other wild tribes, they flourish best when untended and unnoticed, and need then no spaded beds or constant care. Transported across the seas, they put on fine airs and become dainty exotics. Then all vulgar growth must be cleared away from their presence; they require a sunny exposure, regular shower-baths, and plenty of watchful admirers to feed them with compliments. After such coaxing they condescend to spread their petals and exhale their perfumes as best they may, but they are homesick at heart. Stunted and feeble, they

seem to dream in their exile of the torrid suns, the warm, loose earth, and the native thickets that they left behind. The cactus longs through all its ugly stems for Mexican wilds, and says, while opening its rosy cup and drooping within it an exquisite tassel of threadlike stamens, "Yes, this is fine; but it is nothing to what I can do if you will but place me in my beloved tropics, and let me hear my praises in the sweet Spanish tongue." The Norway pine dwindles on Ohio lawns, though held more precious than all the buckeyes and sycamores in the surrounding forests; and in the sough of its branches it pleads for drifting snows, and bleak coasts that are drenched with sleety rains and swept by blasts from the northern sea.

Although Fashion devotes herself to nursing these foreign visitors, the blossoms of our woodlands will not lack for admirers while poets, botanists, and bees exist. Some there may be to study them with the ardor of a Thoreau, though none shall watch them with such keen and sympathetic eyes. When he died they lost, indeed, their

most devoted lover; and it must be that their spring-time is less joyous, since he comes no more to bid them welcome on their opening morning.

Study them as we may, we can read but a few of their secrets. They have freaks and fancies for which we can never account; and they will answer to nobody's beck and call. We cannot tell why New Hampshire woods should be full of noble chestnut-trees, and their long, serrated leaves and rough burrs rarely show themselves in Maine; nor why the mayflower, which abounds in both those States, is so shy of the Massachusetts shore, loving Plymouth and a few towns, but consenting on no account to set its feet in the neighborhood of Boston. Where, during many years, are hidden the seeds of the fireweed, whose flaming spikes first start to life when a woodland has been burnt to the ground? A queenly rhododendron thrives in a Standish swamp in Maine, but grows nowhere else in the region; so that pilgrimages are made to its birthplace, and its clusters are brought many miles to grace Portland drawing-rooms. In the woods between Gloucester and Manchester, in

Massachusetts, may be found a magnolia of rare fragrance, differing from its namesake of the South, and seeming to choose that spot out of all New England for its abiding-place. Whittier has praised the Kalmia latifolia of the Merrimac banks; and all have heard of the famous laurel parties, made year by year in honor of the flower and its poet. The strange pitcher-plant, and the maidenhair fern, with the clean polish of its stems and the grace of its feathery leaflets, take kindly to the hanging baskets of our parlors; but they are nice in their choice of localities, and, like those ghostly Indian-pipes that seem fed upon terrene draughts of milk and ink, are rarely visible in the recesses of our woods. We have seen harebells, blue and pendulous, on many a mountain-side, but never dreamed of what they were capable, till one day, strolling over the island of Mackinaw, we stumbled upon a nook all awave with their pretty cups, and as blue with them as if a bit of the sky had fallen. They were of such size and beauty that we knew ever after where was their happy land; and then we pitied the shivering little crea-

tures that were fighting fate and adverse winds upon the White Mountain slopes, instead of expanding generously in their paradise between the clear waters of two northern lakes. Southern flowers are richer in color, those of colder climes in perfume. It must be when nearing northern lands that the sea-worn mariner scents odors from distant fields. Some peculiar virtue is imparted to herbs when they bloom at great heights; and French pharmacists advertise their simples as grown upon the summits of the Jura.

Poets and women have always loved flowers, for nature has made them not only more sensitive to beauty but more observant than the rest of mankind. English verse is filled with praises of the old-fashioned favorites of our gardens, now so rapidly disappearing; and these flowers are the dearer to us because of the many tender-hearted bards who have cherished them in other days and sung to them undying honors. Shakspeare's dramas abound in portraitures of their varied loveliness, which show that the poet who knew all things best, knew how to paint their delicate charms and to in-

terpret their mute language. We recall dainty images of their beauty in Milton's minor poems; and his "pansy freaked with jet" must occur to every lover of that flower, as fresh and true a phrase as Keats's "sweet-pea on tip-toe for a flight." Several poets have associated their names with some special favorite. The daisy will ever remind us of Burns; Wordsworth's cloud of daffodils can never fade while his works endure; and Shelley's sensitive-plant lies embalmed in his most musical verse. Lowell, like the brave American that he is, sings generous praises to the dandelion; Aldrich weaves his warm Eastern fancies around tiger-lilies; and Bryant has made illustrious the fringed gentian and the yellow violet, shy dwellers by the borders of our damp woods. The regal cardinal-flower, which hangs its scarlet fringes over our brooks in September, planting its feet upon the very edge of the waterfall and lighting the whole leaf-hidden nook with its torch, has never yet been sung as it deserves; neither has the pale, starry clematis, whose clusters crown the wayside hedges, and swing their tendrilled sprays from the elm-

boughs overhead. These shall endure, for nature protects them, and they can wait for their poet. But the garden favorites depart; and as we now wonder what was that hyacinth of the Greeks upon whose petals were writ the woful "Ai, ai!" of the dying quoit-player, and have at best but a faint idea of the rosemary and rue, the stocks and eglantine, of earlier bards, so the generations that succeed us may read of marigolds and pinks, hollyhocks and poppies, as of races that have vanished from our soil, leaving behind them only a dim tradition and immortal praises.

COLLEGE COMMENCEMENTS.

SOME few things on this mundane sphere must ever remain mysteries to the finite mind; and of these the origin of the term "College Commencement" appears to be one. Why that which is in reality an end should be formally proclaimed as a beginning can only be explained as a part of that preference for sound and bluster over simple sense which the use of this sonorous word implies, and which marks more than one proceeding of the closing days at college. A more exact designation might, perhaps, have been expected of learned bodies who make the nice meaning of terms a specialty; but then the profane and ignorant public should be thankful that the occasion is christened

in plain English, which they can at least pronounce, if they may not comprehend.

Time was when Commencement Day was as good as a muster to the region roundabout, and only second in attraction to a travelling circus. Then farmers left their hoes in the field, and farmers' wives forsook milkpans and churns, and started off at dawn with their eager families, that they might have the whole day for hanging about the college grounds. They looked in occasionally at the church, where dignitaries sat in perspiring state behind swaying palm-leaves, but their energies were chiefly devoted to the attendant glories without. Those were the days when the governor and the military came in glittering array, with brass bands before and brass bands behind, and rows of awe-struck boys gaping along the route; when straggling side-shows tempted from many tents and shanties, and pop-beer and gingerbread, dispensed at open stalls, kept the thirsting, hungry crowds alive; when the soldiers, dismissed at the church, went capering past, like "wanton troopers riding by," and a

series of small scuffles and accidents could always be counted on to vary the lagging hours. But, alas! the glory of Ichabod has departed; the roads no longer swarm with well-filled wagons; the groups assembling at the college are mostly sedate and elderly men; frolicsome lads and lassies have vanished from the green; and save the fitful swell of impassioned eloquence that pours through open windows, there is nothing to show that Learning is holding high carnival in her venerable halls.

Class Day is accused of having wrought this change to its own advantage; but it has borrowed no features from the past; and if it attracts the greater crowds, it is because the amusement it furnishes is of the more original sort. Hangers-on and wandering showmen once made the hilarities of Commencement; but the managers of Class Day need no such outside help, for they have set up as their own clowns and mountebanks, and can defy competition.

Class Day stands as the newly ordained festival of an order of students who have heretofore had

no lot or part in the literary exercises of graduation. These last were established and regulated by the sage authorities of the college; and only those who had been good boys and conned diligently their books during the preceding years were suffered to make their bow before admiring friends. Now Chaucer tells us that at Oxford in his day there were the clerks who loved their books, and there were those who cared only for sporting and fine apparel; and human nature during the lapse of five hundred years seems to have made but little headway. The great number of young men who now step from our colleges with a plenty of money and a paucity of brains, and who have led, for the most part, a roistering life in those academic shades, giving their precious days to boating, racing, and ball-play, while cutting recitations and dodging tutors, have felt, on leaving the scene of their exploits, that it was rather hard to be obliged to take the back seats and let the hard-headed old plodders sail in with all the honors. Here was too jolly a chance for display; and, with plenty of friends and resources, their obscure condition was

not to be endured. They took matters into their own hands and devised Class Day; and thenceforward they set to work to make it splendid with gorgeous spreads, dancing, merry-making, ridiculous costumes, howling, scrambles, and the whole pow-wow of its established rowdyisms. Since externals and noise always carry the day with the young, it has won to itself the favor of fair maidens, and forced brave men to smile approval. Everything and everybody has at length been pressed into its service; and even the dignified, slow Commencement has been hurried up for a good month, that it may become linked with the new festival, and with it form a timely and fitting close to the collegiate career. One day, then, of Commencement week, is to be sacred ever after to fun, jollity, and exaggerated nonsense; the corporation and faculty agreeing to look on with infinite condescension, as becomes a body of Solons when engaged in superintending the gambols of high-spirited young savages.

Whoever would see Boston's dowagers at their acme of resplendent attire and radiant smiles, her

damsels in their most ravishing toilettes, and her gilded youth in their blackest broadcloths and yellowest kids, all borne along in shallow, boat-like barouches under arching elms and a cloudless sky, must wend his way toward Harvard on Class Day afternoon; and should he chance to behold the dancing in its open hall he will believe that he has wandered into Arcady, where Corydon and Phyllis are leading up the Lancers to the sound of timbrel and lute. But an hour later, if he looks over those yard-palings, he will see the Phyllises, the matrons, and all weak and infirm persons removed to a safe distance, and the Corydons transformed into such leaping, howling figures that he shall wonder whether they be Bowery roughs out on a festive lark, or a set of enthused young Hottentots performing their religious rites. Strange are the yells and horrible the incantations that come floating to him then on the summer air from that college yard; and did he not know that it took four years of special devotion to logarithmic tables, Greek aorists, chemical formulas, and theological theses to produce such results, he

might be tempted to pity their unfortunate condition.

Such, to the casual observer, is Class Day,—the chief attraction of Commencement week; for though other exercises vary the first few days, they are of little interest to the general public. After this there comes the slow-paced, venerable Commencement Day, when as many of the graduating class as may be alive and in moderate possession of their faculties appear in public procession, and with grave faces and staid demeanor, walk behind their instructors and earthly rulers to the village church, which they enter to slow music and with suspended breath. All trace of the hyena and the South Sea Islander has departed, or lies decently latent under the white vests that spread so immaculately over their manly bosoms. They feel themselves about to join that great army of the alumni who have been in session in the town since early morning, if they did not assemble at their annual meeting the evening before, not edifying each other, as heretofore, by relating their boyish pranks, but discussing, as the rumor runs, certain

bold, revolutionary projects concerning college management, the very suspicion of which sets the president and faculty shuddering with cold tremors, and the elderly divines, who constitute in part the corporate body, clutching their gold cane-heads with unwonted grip.

According to present arrangements, but few things are needed to make Commencement Day a success. The heavens appear invariably to smile on these occasions, and to beam their warmest approval upon the scene. Certain annual celebrations always bring upon us certain weather. No one can doubt that if we had three months of continuous Fast Days, Musters, and Religious Anniversary weeks, we should experience a second deluge; and that if college festivals were strung along, one after the other, to the very edge of the dog-days, we should be afflicted with a season of tropical heats, compared to which the rays of the baleful Sirius would promise a relief. It is probably out of regard to a scorched and suffering world that these festivals have been condensed into one week of early summer; and once having passed

this brief period of oppressive languor we may hope to see the mercury drop now and then below the hissing nineties.

Good weather being relied upon, the first requisite in arranging Commencement exercises is manifestly to secure the attendance of some attractive lion, perhaps a stray major-general, at all odds the governor, and any other dignitary of titled condition who may happen to be travelling in the neighborhood. These, and the goodly number of the alumni which the fresh interest awakened in our colleges during the past few years is sure to bring, enable the trustees, faculty, and orating graduates to take their seats upon the stage at the appointed hour, confident that all will be well. After the Latin salutatory, to which everybody listens with an air of breathless interest, and, let us hope, with inward satisfaction, to its close, the audience lapses into a state of semi-stupefaction, induced by the heat and the steady flow of sounding periods, which even frantic appeals to the spirit of liberty, the memory of our fathers, the late war, and the future of the republic fail to dispel.

Ladies brighten up at the advent of each new aspirant, as he appears in faultless swallow-tail coat, lavender necktie, and ambrosial locks, resolved, it would seem, to personate Beau Brummel and Daniel Webster rolled into one; and coquettish maidens single out the most attractive for audacious flirting in the very face and eyes of the State authorities, and even turn upon the latter the batteries of their smiling glances when other victims fail. At last, however, the maidens steal out of doors for a stroll with rambling members of the class, whose names, by a mysterious arrangement which their friends cannot explain, fail to appear on the programme, though they are known to be transformed into some strange Carolus or Guilielmus in a roll of parchment that lies awaiting each graduate at the president's right hand. More heroic souls sit through the philosophical orations, the forensic disputations, and all the other ponderous and oppressive titles with which somebody christens on the bills the compositions of these fledgling orators; and in which said fledglings give indisputable proof that they

have swept through all history, sacred and profane, are up on the wars of the Tartars, have the Zendavesta at their tongues' end, and survey the whole range of temporal affairs with the calm, grand outlook of an elevated stoic. The showers of bouquets that thump the toes of these retiring heroes prove that somewhere before them bright eyes are awake and aware of the progress of events. When the last candidate for irregular honors has followed the valedictorian, when the degrees have been distributed, and several honorary initials conferred upon those whose favor the college wishes to secure, and who will consent to the infliction, a line of march is taken up for the dining-hall; and there, after the protracted fast, we picture them all as seated in solemn conclave, transformed into a closed avenue of rapacious cormorants, and bent only on devouring whatever flesh and fowl may come in their way. As no foot of woman is suffered at such times to step into their august presence, we hazard this as a mere fancy sketch. But we know from hearsay that the president is able to rise afterward and relate in the blandest manner the

benefactions that Alma Mater has received during the past year, to direct urgent appeals for additional funds to the plethoric pockets before him, and to pour at the last, as best he may, conciliatory oil on the rising antagonisms of alumni and trustees. Other speeches follow, and there is an end.

The reception in the evening brings to the young orators the compliments of female friends, and affords the latter a chance to display their loveliest attire; and what greater bliss is possible to youthful hearts?

Thus passes Commencement Day; and thus passes a new group of educated, ambitious young men, the flower and hope of the land, out over the threshold to face the sober relations of life.

LUXURIES.

REDUCE the necessaries of life to their lowest terms, and you find but two or three substances essential to continued existence. Air, water, food, — these three will suffice, in any hospitable clime, for keeping the inner fires steadily burning. Yet so dependent has civilization made us that we accept all its common productions as indispensable to our needs, and reckon as luxuries only the things which are at present rare and difficult to obtain. These will vary for every one according to the circumstances that surround him, and they will comprise what he chiefly lacks. The witty philosopher who exclaims, "Give me the luxuries of life, and I will do without its

necessities," knows very well that the wants of another can be no criterion for his own.

Commerce and the arts tend to multiply all new and rare objects, and thus the luxuries of one age become the necessaries of the next. Carpets and chimneys belong now to every cottage; but Queen Elizabeth herself had to sweep her ermined trains over rush-strewn floors, and the noblemen of her land once sat blinking in smoke that curled along the rafters with no chance of escape. We subsist on what were the delicacies of our forefathers' tables. The potato was first stared at as a curious tuber from South American wilds; and tea was sipped at great entertainments, two hundred years ago, as the rarest and costliest of drinks. We remember that nails and pins had their day of value, when we see in old houses the floor-boards fastened down with wooden pegs, and when we consider that pin-money meant the greater part of the expense of the toilet. Only in the galleries of the rich were formerly preserved the portraits of beloved friends, but now the sun sketches them for the poorest laborer; chromos reproduce the

lines and color of rare paintings for his walls, and the stereoscope brings before him the truest semblance of distant and unvisited scenes. Thus the modern arts which science creates seem ingenious inventions by which luxuries may be multiplied and cheapened. What has not chemistry already done to give comfort to our daily lives, and what may it not do in the future?

So rapidly have luxuries increased during the past few years that we wonder what new marvels shall be furnished to the ages that come after. Will an experimenter succeed at last in manufacturing pears and peaches out of their elementary ingredients, so that fresh fruit may be made to order in midwinter? Will balloons be regulated, and air-travelling rendered practicable, so that each man shall keep a balloon hitched to a stake by his door-step, and horses and boats be thereafter superfluous? Will one immense electric light on a lofty tower illuminate the city at night, and one vast umbrella, swung aloft, shade it by day? Vain is it to forecast the doings of this ingenious creature, man. The wildest speculations

might soon read like prosaic statements of fact; as Ariel's girdle shadowed forth the actual achievements of the modern telegraph.

Our present luxuries are of two kinds, those intended merely for display, and those which contribute to actual comfort. The former are condemned by moralists as part of the pomps and vanities which sober minds should despise. Yet in pleasing the sight they minister to the least gross and material of the senses. That love of beauty which they seek to gratify underlies all our efforts to give charm and refinement to life, and leads to that longing for perfection which is the saving of us all. Nature's varied colorings of cloud and plumage, foliage and bloom, are but pomps and vanities in which she delights; and shall we, her children, reared amid her symmetries, fail to admire whatever about us is comely and elegant? We think with pleasure of Cleopatra as sweeping gayly along the Nile under the sheen of silken sails, and esteem Mary of Scotland none the less devout because she would read her prayers only from a missal bound in velvet and clasped with gold.

These braveries of the sight are prized in our early years, while the luxuries that minister to bodily ease become the favorites of age. Then life, to be endurable, must be softly padded with creature comforts and spiced with delicate dainties. The youth finds breathing and moving luxuries enough, and scorns external aids, as the weak indulgences of a Sybarite. Give him the open sky, pathless woods, a good rifle and prospective game, and he welcomes a bed of broken boughs and a dewy canopy of stars. By and by his love of adventure vanishes before a fear of rheumatic twinges, and he remembers the nights he spent *sub Jove* as the escapades of folly. Nothing now can win him from a couch of down, warm coverlets, and a house-door securely bolted.

It is the common belief that luxuries tend to enervate the character. Historians trace the effeminacy and fall of Carthage to her wide commerce and the indulgences it brought, and find the source of Sparta's martial glory in the austere and rigorous training of her children. On the poet's page, the land of delights is always the land

of sloth; and the men who eat lotus never figure as heroes or saints. Milton assigns the crown of bays to him who "scorns delights, and lives laborious days;" and an older and greater bard than he warns us that the sirens who sing so sweetly from purple islands would fain lure us to our ruin, and that our only safety is to turn a deaf ear, and go laboring by through the chill, opposing surge. It is obviously true that wrestling with difficulties gives tone and firmness to the mind. The ship-builder selects for his mast the oak that has grown upon the sea-coast, and hardened there to a compact, unyielding fibre, in its battle with storm and wind; and we look for strength and endurance in the character that has kept up a daily contest with fate.

Yet in a life of ease, the fairest material paradise will not content the soul that has once been made susceptible to nobler influences and ambitions. External beauty and the appliances of art cannot pamper the body unless the spirit has been starved. The wealth of life without does not work the harm, but the poverty of life

within. A love of generous daring, a desire for mental and moral excellence, will give incentive for effort, and develop difficulties which the aids of wealth are powerless to remove. We may delight the sense with costly viands and draughts of nectar, but "the thirst that in the soul doth rise doth ask a drink divine."

No nation on the earth consumes so many luxuries as our own. The *nil admirari* doctrine forms no part of American philosophy. Palaces are none too good for our houses, nor the vesture of kings for our daily wear; the oceans are white with our sails, sent out in quest of the delicacies of every land; we keep the looms of Europe busy, weaving velvets and silks, and drain her markets of diamonds. Yet these expensive imports are sought for a nation of earnest workers, toiling as no nation ever toiled before. The humblest of our people desires for himself the best that the world can offer, and finds in this desire his motive to strive. If we had feared something of the effeminacy of Carthage as the result of such a dainty-seeking commerce, the first out-

break of our late war convinced us that other things still remained dearer than traffic and dalliance, and that the young men who had given their days to workshops and counting-rooms needed but a bugle-call to transform them into heroes.

We are beginning, however, to reap some of the evil fruits of a too extravagant life. Families of the best and most cultivated of our people, those whom we need in our own communities, are departing by hundreds to foreign cities, exiling themselves from country and friends that they may enjoy the pleasures they prize without this necessity of ostentatious and burdensome display. Those who remain behind gladly escape in summer from elegant mansions to simple country retreats; and so readily do their epicurean tastes accustom themselves to the little, bare cottages, and such comfort do they appear to take in hard chairs at frugal tables, that we question whether this luxurious, complicated housekeeping is not after all a bore, kept up, like European armaments, solely because one wishes to know himself to be on an

equal footing with his neighbors. If a general reduction could be agreed upon, society would no doubt experience a sense of relief. Venetian ladies probably enjoyed themselves more in the black-painted gondolas which the law of the republic finally enjoined upon all, than when they made the Grand Canal gorgeous with their splendid rivalries. The supreme satisfaction of knowing that others could not possibly outshine them must have compensated for the loss of their brighter surroundings.

Of the real luxuries that conduce to health, ease, and even to beauty, we cannot have too many; and we trust that every year will bring an increase of such enjoyments to the poorest dwellings. Our only danger lies in not making them subordinate to higher, more enduring pleasures. Because riches are needed to procure them, we seem ready to abandon all other duties, and the pursuit of all other blessings, in a mad chase after wealth. When Agassiz declared that he had no time to spend in making money, he uttered what few of his adopted countrymen could comprehend. But

in taking thought for what we shall eat and what we shall drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed, let us not forget that the life is more than meat and the body than raiment.

SMALL-TALK ONE OF THE FINE ARTS.

ALTHOUGH talk in different forms has always been one of the chief agencies that rule the world, its influence was never greater than at the present time. This arises partly from the republican character which modern governments tend more and more to assume, since the persuasion of public speakers becomes the most effective means for moulding into harmony the diverse wills of the people; and partly from an increasing respect for that mental culture which reveals itself most clearly in the lofty thoughts and ready expression of a polished orator. In our admiration of his burning eloquence, the valiant deeds of silent heroes are forgotten. Ulysses still wins the shield from Ajax; the man of plausible argument out-

wits the mighty wielder of spears and battle-axes. We send to our legislative halls the men who can harangue, and know not whether they be wise or foolish, reckless or judicious. There they sit, making speeches at each other day after day, voting in the intervals upon laws and regulations, according as the eloquence of defenders or opponents prevails. If they show themselves skilled in debate, grand in declamation, effective in retort, their constituents are satisfied, and enroll them among the statesmen of whom the country is proud.

It is a common saying that man is distinguished from the brute by his noble gift of speech; but in this we are assuming altogether too much. We call all animals dumb, and imply a certain pity in the word; but in some native language of their own they may be calling us likewise poor dumb creatures, and commiserating our inability to frame their speech. The sounds they utter, which are unintelligible to us, and which we are content to describe as crowing, cackling, neighing, mewing, chirping, barking, may be the articulated words of unwritten dialects, in which each different species

finds expression for its thoughts and desires. Who ever heard a flock of ducks quacking together, as they waddled along in single file toward a pond, without being convinced that they were holding sweet and earnest converse by the way? Who can listen to a quarrel between martins and swallows in early spring, before some besieged and airy domicile, and believe that all their vociferous chatter is meaningless to them? It is evident that they are calling each other feathered rascals and villains, and are dealing out threats and objurgations in epithets that their hearers do not mistake. The deep-voiced frogs, croaking through all the country-side under the starlight and dews, may be gurgling tender serenades, in their cold-blooded fashion, to lady-loves beneath the waves, although Aristophanes failed to translate them into his rough Greek. When we come upon a solemn company of crows that have settled on the tall tree of a lonely wood, we stop to listen to their hoarse notes, in full faith that much meaning is carried in such sepulchral tones, and that they have halted there to discuss their prospects, and to

determine upon a plan for the next campaign. Or, for aught we know, they may be repeating the substance of that fine old English ballad, which tells us how three of their race sat on a tree, debating where they should dine, when one of them related that in a lonesome glen a noble knight lay freshly slain, and then summoned them all to a banquet on his white neck and "bonny blue een," adding that the "golden down on his young chin would do to wrap their young ones in."

These birds have, it may be, their favorite orators, who are versed in all tricks of stump-speaking, and sway at will the less gifted of their kind. But until they invent writing for themselves, and an alphabet, and furnish us with a skilled interpreter, we shall have to call their eloquence and their small-talk the veriest jargon. We find our pleasure in the sweet warbling of merrier birds; since music and laughter, in which these joyous little souls delight, are the only utterances that possess a universal and unvarying speech. We understand them at once, as we do a Frenchman or Chinaman when he laughs or sneezes, whistles

or cries. If Mother Nature speaks directly, her children need never run for their dictionaries.

The talk of human beings, which is thus far the only talk with which we are at all conversant, may be divided into two classes, oratory and conversation. In the former, one acts as autocrat among his hearers, and pours forth burning eloquence or convincing argument without comment or interruption. Conversation is the familiar, intimate communion of a few, without, it may be, any purpose to influence or please. Here one no longer rules; all are allowed equal rights for suggestion or reply. If oratory is absolutism in speech, the latter partakes of the nature of democracy.

Among uneducated people conversation has a tendency to degenerate into gossip; since they feel no interest in matters that do not concern their actual daily life, whatever transpires beyond their own village and their own set of acquaintances seems remote and unimportant. The trifling acts of their neighbors are scanned and considered with as much attention as the world gives to the formal address of a powerful sovereign.

In such communities the inhabitants resolve themselves into a secret council, before which the actions of every one must be brought. It does not give a favorable view of human nature, and yet it is true that every person on trial before them is supposed to be guilty till he is proved to be innocent. This proof, moreover, must always be adduced in his absence; the court sits only when his back is turned; and, far from adopting the French method of allowing him to testify in his own defence, it never informs him when his case is to come up, or, indeed, that any case has been preferred against him. If witnesses appear in his behalf, they must come without summoning and of their own free will. The final decision is made known to all except to the one most interested, for care is taken to render the verdict when he is out of court. This system of procedure justly makes gossip appear to honest minds mean, cowardly, and uncharitable; and yet, such is the keen attention it excites, the edge and flavor of its personalities, the relish for its wild surmises, that all save the best are tempted to indulge in it.

Perhaps the minister's wife is the greatest sufferer from these secret tribunals, these Star Chambers that are set up in all small villages; for, in the opinion of her sex, she can never succeed in performing a proper or praiseworthy act. And yet the current notion that women are peculiarly addicted to gossip is a slander that has too long been received. Were any painter given this subject for his canvas, he would without doubt portray three old crones bending over the tea-table, with heads in close conjunction, and fingers lifted to enforce emphasis and enjoin silence. But this is only one half the picture. A companion piece should represent the interior of a country grocery store, where, among barrels of flour and piles of salt fish, more gossip is talked in one evening by the assembled crowd of customers than is heard in all the farm-houses of the town. Their neighbor's crops, his hired men, the weight of his hogs, the vegetables he sends to market, the tax he pays the minister, the state of his fences, — all are commented on in his absence with eager interest. In large cities the sight and the mind are

occupied by so many objects that gossip declines, and one cares not even to read the door-plate on the adjoining house. But wherever people are curious, idle, and ignorant, whether in town or country, gossip will always engross a large share of their speech.

But neither oratory, sustained conversation, nor gossip answers the purpose for which small-talk exists. The latter has a province of its own; it furnishes the means of intercourse to a large and mixed assemblage of people, where speeches would be out of place, and continuous discourse impossible. It allows no flights of eloquence like oratory, no unbroken train of ideas like conversation, no personal animadversions like gossip; but shifts and glances and sparkles, touching lightly on every theme and holding fast to none. Its object is to keep all minds alert but not intent, and to enliven society by an airy grace and playfulness that shall relieve it for a while of the weight and strain of serious duties. It expresses no wants, subserves no material purpose; and it is possible only in a polite assembly, brought together in leisurely

elegance for the mere interchange of general good-will. It may, therefore, be properly classed among the fine arts. We can conceive of savages exhorting each other in glowing harangues, and indulging in personal slanders, but small-talk would be beyond their power to use or to comprehend. Men of serious thought give it the contemptuous name it bears, and affect to treat it with disdain, because it listens to no lengthy speculations and pays slight homage to their grand ideas. They stigmatize it as the fit vehicle of those flat truisms and empty comments to which most minds are reduced by poverty and inaction. It may often require earnest thinkers, it is true, to give grain in exchange for chaff; but its aim is to afford pleasure to all, not to benefit a few.

Of all talk, it is in its nature the most democratic. It allows superior intellects no tyranny, weak minds no silent submission, but summons all alike to a share in its control. No man so wise or so brilliant that he may engross its opportunities, no egotist so self-involved that he may disregard its swift-sent replies. Hobbies are banished from its

sphere; the philosopher finds in it no chance to air his theories, the reader his book-learning, the scientist his discoveries; special advantages are waived, for all must meet on common ground in a perfect equality.

Since small-talk adapts itself to the average intelligence, its themes are necessarily simple and general. It must remind no one of his ignorance, or force another to apparent condescension. Its nature forbids argument and earnest discussion; hence it ignores the topics on which men cherish deep and various prejudices. Politics and religion are outlaws in its domain. It skips lightly over all such themes, avoiding them with the ease and grace with which Mignon danced among the eggs.

Its train of thought must bend to every suggestion and adopt each last reply, making subsequent sentences answer the hints and flashes that preceded. A steady course in it is possible to none; every slight breeze that ruffles the sails requires a new tack. What it loses in spicy interest, when compared with gossip, it must supply by

dash and piquancy, keeping its bright sallies ever flying, like gilded balls tossed from the hand of an Indian juggler.

The Augustan age of small-talk is yet in the future. It is limited now to the mere trifles of daily life; but when the prevailing intelligence shall permit it to glance swiftly over all matters of art, nature, and social culture, it will become rich and suggestive, and illumine with its lightning flashes the whole extent of human interests. The common possession of tact — which is merely the name we give to the delicate imagination that can surmise another's wishes, and furnish a ready means for indulging them — shall spare each man's feelings from careless wounds. Quick, sympathetic intelligence, a mental sensitiveness to the nicest shades of thought, shall catch the subtle meanings that lurk in the lift of an eyebrow, a wink, or the curl of a lip-corner, and fully seize the vanishing fancy. Playfulness and merry good-humor shall diffuse happiness by their sportive conceits; shallow dulness will be impossible when wit condenses its sense and eloquence into a few

telling words, converting brief speeches into proverbs and epigrams. In such brilliant contests the emperors of thought will descend into the arena, that they may try their light rapiers, or learn a dexterous use of their ponderous weapons.

Such is small-talk in its ideal attainment; and though we may never see its perfection realized in the society of our time a glimpse of its possibilities will lead us to regard it with honor, as an equal interchange of fresh and sparkling thoughts expressed for the delight of all.

OUR MODERN WINTERS.

THERE is a prevailing opinion at the present day to the effect that almanacs and the weather have no apparent connection, and that those prognostications concerning the future state of the elements in which all people delight to indulge are certain beforehand to prove false. The degree of heat or cold that we may expect at any particular period can no longer be determined from the records of the past.

It is not that the months have departed, to any extent, from their old distinctive character, but that all the seasons in their circling round seem to bring us a warmer atmosphere than was once their own. The flowers of spring surprise us with their early advent; summer increases her languid

heats; and the mellow days of autumn succeed each other like one prolonged Indian summer. This average yearly increase of temperature is especially noticeable in winter. Formerly we expected to find ourselves at Thanksgiving listening behind frosty panes to old Boreas and his whistling crew; and a sleigh-ride was one of the unfailing festivities of Christmas. Now New Year's Day often passes before the ground is hidden from sight; and we glide into May without realizing that the dreaded winter has gone.

What the statistics of meteorologists might prove we cannot say; but there appear good reasons for the belief that the climate of New England has materially changed from what it was fifty years ago. Men of middle age tell us that in their youth, after a winter storm, they often went to school across lots, with no trace of paths or fences visible for miles, and that snow-shoes were then a necessary and common article of wear. Any such general engulfing of highways and obliteration of landmarks are almost unknown to the younger inhabitants of these country towns; and they listen

to such marvels with the same open-mouthed, incredulous wonder with which they peruse the tales of Baron Munchausen. A certain venerable cottage of respectable size stands to-day in a meadow in the southern part of Maine; and though we never saw snow above its window-sills in midwinter, old farmers of the region remember that once after a long storm it was found to be buried completely from sight; and when neighbors went to the rescue of the two aged women within it, they were forced to dig an arched way at random into the surrounding mass till they struck the door. There they found a cordial greeting from the benighted inmates, who had not seen earth or sky for nearly forty-eight hours, and who were wondering if they should ever again communicate with the outer world. In our early days we felt an irresistible desire to whistle upon hearing that story; and even now it has to our mind very much the air of those extraordinary recitals which people are recommended to narrate to the marines.

Once in a great while, it is true, there is vouchsafed to us a sight of one of these traditional storms.

A deluge of snow which swept over the Northern States a few years ago still figures as one of the weather marvels of our time. Then, in many places, no sleigh ventured forth for days; and when at length the roads were broken out, they were like deep canals scooped out between towering banks, so that at first only the tips of the riders' whips could be seen from the farm-house windows, and then, after a thaw, the tops of their tall hats. But occurrences like this, which we expect to behold but once in a lifetime, appear to have been the normal condition of affairs half a century ago.

Of course we know what wonderful things were always happening when people were young. Such hailstones are never seen now as those which our fathers tell us thumped their small pates when they were hurrying from school, — hailstones big as hens' eggs, laying grain and flower-beds prostrate at a blow, and smashing unnumbered panes of glass with their rattling flood; no such awful eclipses or unexpected dark days as those which terrified our mothers in their pinafores, when a

sickly darkness chilled the air at noonday, setting dogs to howling and cats to considering their ways, and making the hearts of the hens fail them for fear. After the great shower of meteors which fell a few years ago, and which modern astronomers heralded as most rare and glorious, we were surprised to learn that it was in no way comparable to that which many men had witnessed in their youth, when for several hours the stars of the firmament seemed shooting in every direction, and falling around the observer in scintillating rain. These wondrous scenes and portents dire must be accepted as real events; though we query if the ears of the next generation are not destined to be startled, and the hair of their heads to stand on end, when we relate in after years the experiences of our own day. Who would not be a hero if himself could be the chronicler? It shall go hard with us if these do not seem fearsome times, and such as try men's souls, when we sit, forty years hence, in mob-cap and spectacles, rehearsing them to groups of childish listeners.

But, making due allowance for the natural ex-

aggeration of story-tellers, when memory has failed and impressions only remain, there can, we suppose, be no doubt that a considerable increase of temperature has for a long period been mollifying our New England climate. This is the general testimony of elderly, observant men; and the plain facts which they relate cannot be questioned. Similar changes are known to have taken place in other lands. Italy was formerly visited with much severer winters than any which her shivering children now experience, as they hover over braziers of coals in unwarmed old palaces. When Horace sends an ode to his city friends, inviting them to sup with him at his country fireside, he begins with the declaration that now Soracte stands covered with deep snow, — a sight which the inhabitant of Sabine meadows rarely, if ever, sees to-day. He has, moreover, much to say about the frozen Tiber, and the masses of ice and snow that surround Rome, — a state of things at present unknown in that southern clime.

It may be that the cutting down of forests has something to do with the change; but this single

cause can hardly suffice to produce such effects. Americans find it always convenient to attribute perturbations of the thermometer to irregularity in the course of the Gulf Stream and of southern-bound icebergs; but will any man, learned in currents and winds, tell us if it be true that our warm river in the sea has swerved of late years from its regular course, melting the icebergs before their time, and wafting to us some of the bland breezes with which England has so long been regaled? It has been said that certain philosophers connect these strange variations of temperature with the spots that appear and vanish upon the face of the sun; for the same reason, we suppose, that the Tenterden steeple was held responsible for the Godwin Sands.

But, after all, we are only coming to our proper bearings in respect to heat. It would seem to be the most natural thing in the world that we should luxuriate in mild, enjoyable winters; for are not we New Englanders dwelling on the same parallels of latitude that pass through the provinces of northern Italy and the vineyards of southern France?

And why should we be wading through deep snows amid hyperborean rigors, while citizens of Rome are surprised when they find icicles fringing their fountains, and the Florentines gaze at a few wavering snow-flakes in blank dismay? Of late, as our winters have been growing milder, theirs have become correspondingly severe; so that it may be that Nature is attempting to straighten her isothermal lines.

We are not yet prepared, however, to recommend Plymouth Rock as a desirable site for a winter residence, and we must still consider ourselves as peculiarly favored in regard to a prevalence of east winds; but it is our conviction, nevertheless, that the New England of to-day is not as cold as she is painted. From the recorded sufferings of our early colonists historians and novelists appear to draw their information, when they exhaust their supply of desolate adjectives in describing the severities of our climate. A perusal of their pages would lead one to suppose that the unbroken wilderness of snow and ice amid which the Pilgrims passed their first winter was a regular feature of our modern

Decembers. We are reminded, on reading them, of the stories told of the arctic zone by Sir John Mandeville, the oldest traveller and most fascinating liar of whom our literature preserves any record. He relates that in his day the cold of that region was said to be so great that all sounds, whether of guns, trumpets, or the voices of men, were frozen up as soon as uttered, and never heard until the spring, when they all thawed out together and produced a wild babel in the air. Geographers leave us to infer that the chief products of Maine are snow-drifts and pine-trees; and on taking up a brief biography of Governor Andrew, written by Mrs. Stowe, we find her describing his birthplace in that State as one of those bleak mountain towns of northern New England where winter reigns six months in the year, and where the inhabitants are forced to shelter themselves within doors the greater part of the time. Can this be the town, we ask ourselves, whose hillsides, as we fondly remember them, seem ever waving with silky grass and golden buttercups, and where, in our dreams, bobolinks, tipsy with joy, never

cease their carols over blossoming orchard-trees? It was during the last days of November that we stood upon one of its low hills, with mayflower-leaves showing green at our feet, and chickadees calling merrily from the trees or flitting about in the warm sun. Seventy miles off towered the whole range of the White Mountains, gleaming lustrously white from base to summit in their winter robes; but so sharply were they contrasted with the bare brown fields stretching in a vast plain between our station and their elevated peaks that they shone afar, like a luminous mirage of mighty icebergs. Often Christmas passes in the town without snow, and mayflowers come in April. The neighboring province of Canada suffers the same misrepresentation. In an old Geography it is illustrated by the picture of two men digging a sheep out of a snow-drift; and our youthful impressions of the land were of a realm buried perennially under tumbled masses of snow, tracked only by beavers and otters, and holding direct aerial communication with the North Pole. When we beheld it for ourselves, it was the garden of

America that we saw, with level fields of billowy grain extending to the horizon, and tangled hedges of wild-flowers lining the roads on either hand. We knew there was another side to the picture, but this attractive side had never been shown us.

When a designating epithet gets into literature, it is fixed beyond the possibility of change; and whatever character our climate may hereafter acquire, it will always be held to resemble that of Greenland; as foreigners, familiar only with the traditional Yankee of the stage, still believe our city streets to be filled with men carrying lank carpet-bags, wherein rattle a few wooden nutmegs, which they are retailing in nasal tones, with a strange twist to their o's. If the portrait painted for us cannot be exact and lifelike, it is a pity that it should not err on the side of flattery, instead of caricaturing us so abominably.

SPRING AS SEEN FROM A CITY WINDOW.

THAT season of vernal joys which has returned each year to gladden the hearts of all the generations of men, and which has been written about by every poet that ever rhymed, still wears for us as fresh a charm as when the first grass-blades covered the hillsides in Eden, and the roses budded under the wondering eyes of Eve.

City people consult no almanacs, and only know of frisking lambs, loosened brooks, and May's balmy zephyrs, as pretty terms in old-fashioned romances. When March winds begin to course along deserted streets, they waft no fragrant prophecies from banks of violet or thyme,

but seem rather to have skimmed over arctic seas, and to have left a whole flotilla of icebergs stranded off the coast. As for nature's awakening, stone pavements give an effectual quietus to every stirring root that would fain send forth a shoot into the upper air. But, walking between brick walls and over hard sidewalks, the denizens of the town are yet conscious of certain infallible signs by which the presence of this benign season may be detected, long before the grass is green in the public square, or the trees wave their leaflets overhead.

When the shop-windows bloom out gorgeously with bright cambrics and delicate muslins, and lingering groups of women drift past them with rapt, adoring looks; when winter clothing suddenly oppresses us as too shabby and grievous to be borne; when pretty damsels imprison themselves behind veils of barege, and squinting dowagers erect diminutive parasols; when the grocer brings us exotic greens and lettuce, and sets down every wilted leaf to our account; when small boys with grimy knuckles are snapping marbles in

the alley-ways, and small girls are trolling hoops on the dry walks; when whirls of dust overtake us at the street-corners, and send us home, only to find that quiet paradise upheaved through all its strata, carpets torn up and curtains down, and Chaos and Old Night, in the shape of sundry mops, pails, and besoms, taking possession of the chamber floors, — then it is we know that spring, the sweet spring, beloved of poets, painters, and lovers, has come. These are the heralds that announce the presence of that beautiful maiden of whom Mrs. Barbauld sings, who approaches clothed in a robe of light green, and breathes upon the rivers till their icy fetters melt away. We submit with patience to such annoying preludes of her reign as greet us in city streets, for are they not the harbingers of the rainbows and bobolinks, the apple-blossoms and meadow buttercups, that we hope to see in other places before she shall bid us good-by? Though a flying visit to distant fields has shown us patches of snow dwindling on the north side of pasture-walls, and the brimming Merrimac heaving cold and dark

between his leafless banks, we still fancy, on our return, that the hillsides far away are shining with verdure, and that every sunny hillock is awave with wind-flowers and violets.

Sitting here at our window, overlooking a busy thoroughfare and the wide, open reach of the city Common, we find delight in watching the gradual advances of the spring. No more hoar-frost shining upon the iron fences; no more relics of the last snow-squall melting on the springing turf beyond. In the sunny street, light basket-phaetons with swaying canopies replace the glancing sleighs that sped so merrily along the road to Brighton, and sent up to us the pleasant jingle of their bells. We scent coming dandelions in these soft western gales that blow over the Common, though only a few weeks ago they seemed to sweep up from the Back Bay laden with invisible needle-points. The pedestrians who were then making short cuts on the cleared paths were forced to fight every step of the way. Men turned coat-collars about their ears, and women held muffs to their faces, while the wind howled

through their rigging as it does through a ship's canvas in the first mutterings of a storm. At street-corners, where blasts have held "high jinks" the winter long, small school-boys, homeward bound, were glad to clutch their dictionaries to save themselves from an airy ascent, remembering, perhaps, the story of the geese who carried pebbles in their mouths when doubling a windy promontory of Greece. Now people saunter at their ease; and although spring breezes are still given to whirling great sandy gusts up and down, even when the skies are warm and "the lift unclouded blue," the upper realms are fast taking on that ethereal mildness with which the poets endow them. Probably no one is more conscious of the change than the stolid old hero in fur cap and soldier's coat, who sits by the broad walk, with his printed songs spread out enticingly to the gaze of passers-by, and a "Life of Napoleon" hung on the fence behind him, so that all who run may read. He has kept at his post in the very teeth of the wind, through the coldest days, and must realize better than most

what comfort lies in bland zephyrs and soft skies.

The grass is already fresh and green on the high bank behind him, where a small and ancient graveyard lies forgotten under its trees. There, since the last shower, a myriad of golden dandelions have opened their eyes between the quaint headstones, and the vines that climb around the tall urns are bursting into bud. A great stranger in these parts, a pretty yellow butterfly, was seen there to-day; and he went fluttering over the ground in a bewildered manner, as if just awakened from a long sleep and trying to accustom himself to the strange spring suit in which he found himself arrayed. Two dilapidated old gardeners have been busy since morning, raking the fresh turf and loosening the earth about the tree-boles. They are chatting together over their spades; and if we could hear their talk we should find it as edifying, perhaps, as that of the grave-diggers in "Hamlet." Verdure and sods are all that need their care in that secluded spot; for, save a wreath of dry amaranths, no cultivated

bud or blossom brightens its shades. We must go up to the great elm if we would find crocuses in bloom; and they cluster, too, before the houses in the street beyond, together with flaming tulips, and daffadowndillies that have come to town and are nodding in drowsy sweetness among spikes of gay hyacinths.

But if the little graveyard lies asleep, the world that surrounds it is stirring with restless life. We hear approaching the steady tattoo of a drum, and behold a school-boy regiment marching by the paling to its summer parade-ground, silken banner flying, bayonets flashing, and hundreds of small feet beating the ground with soldier-like precision. No victor of a hundred fights ever waved his sword with a more martial air than does that young commander, as he steps back across the shadows, calling to his men; no war-worn veterans on the very edge of battle could advance with a more determined front. When this army of the future takes the field, we may be sure that every man of them will do his best to slay the dastard foe or to come back upon his shield.

On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, the sandy ground where the soldiers are wont to display their tactics is alive with ball-players; for then our juvenile heroes are released from military hardships, and free to follow their own sweet will. There we see the city *gamins* swarming by hundreds, all of a size, all of a color, and apparently all of an age, and leaping and skipping like so many tireless insects under summer boughs. Little girls, clinging to their nurses, stroll along the edges of the adjoining bank, and look down upon the wild sport with envy in their eyes, but are soon hurried along out of the reach of plunging footballs. It is the national game, however, which chiefly engrosses that seething crowd of urchins; and they remain, swinging their clumsy little bats in a promiscuous manner, till the pangs of hunger send them off, on a home run, to the warm suppers and scolding mothers that, we doubt not, await them somewhere in this hive of humanity.

Now and then a kite is brought down into the space; and everybody is eager to assist in starting

it on an upward career. But, for all the holding and running and shouting, it does not quit its native earth without a struggle; it dives down in sudden spasms, and clings to the nearest branches, and sails off, when it must, with a sort of protest in its veering course. There it goes, mounting aloft, and flourishing its tail from side to side, but settling at length into a steady pull that keeps the string taut, and makes the little fellow beneath it unwind the reel in proud haste. For some strange reason, men and women do not fly kites, — none except Dr. Franklin and Mr. Dick; but if we were to live our life over again, we should spend half our leisure days in holding kite-strings from the back doorstep. It is so fine to see the graceful creature swaying and soaring up there among the clouds and the birds, leagues away in the ether, where you could never go, and yet obedient to the twitch of your little finger, and pleading with you, by its mighty strain, for a longer tether and a higher flight.

The organ-grinders come at morning to give us their greeting; and whether the tune they offer be

"The Girl I left behind me," "Marching through Georgia," or the "Last Rose of Summer," we are always charmed. Their wheezy melody could not well be spared from the pleasures of a city life. It harmonizes the jar and clatter of the street, and proclaims that in the midst of a bread-and-butter-getting community some one finds his account in ministering, however poorly, to æsthetic tastes. Never have we found their tones unwelcome, save on the morning when one of them struck up the glorious "Marseillaise" under our window, at the very hour when we knew that foreign legions were marching through the streets of desolate Paris, and forcing her to drink of the bitterest dregs of defeat. Those were the days when we were sorry for France, and pictured Paris as a proud Zenobia, unconquered in her chains, even while pacing behind the triumphal car of a German kaiser.

In this lovely April weather the hand-organ's cheery music seems a part of the gladness of spring. We wish the swarthy old Italian would look less dolorous as he grinds out his rollicking

strains; and that the little girl beside him, who beats her circle of bells in such a listless fashion, would start off into hilarious jigs on the pavement, tapping her tambourine briskly upon head and elbows, and spinning it wildly on her finger-tips, to celebrate these radiant days. All winter long she has come to delight us, and often, we fear, has caught more snow-flakes than pennies in her lifted tambourine; but she looked as jovial then as she does to-day. Even the ring of hard metal at her feet cannot tempt her into a smile. Sorry little minstrel, is it nothing to you that the roses and lilies will soon be here, and that bluebirds and robins even now sit listening above your head? When happy faces greet you behind the casements, and happy sunshine sparkles on your tinkling bells, can you not forget poverty and weariness, and remember only that the spring has come?

Trees put on slowly the garniture of spring. All is fresh and blooming underfoot long before their naked branches show signs of the busy forces at work within them. But now buds appear,

feathering every twig and tendril; and, seen in the distance, the tree stands enveloped in a haze of color, too delicate to hide the tracery of its boughs. The elms are draped in misty brown; the red blood of the maple flushes to the tip of the highest spray; the trailing willows shiver under a veil of tenderest green; and green, too, with waving foliage is the long hedge of lilac-bushes that girds the little graveyard as with a verdurous wall. What a tossing of purple plumes there will be along that high bank on breezy June mornings; what wafts of sweet odor floating up to us through the still evening air! There in the corner a young cherry-tree has already worn its snowy garlands, and dropped them, petal by petal, upon the stone tablet beneath. Even the ungainly Balm of Gilead, that stretches high and wide its boughs of grayish white, is swinging tasselled blossoms aloft in the warm wind. A few more weeks of such sunny weather, and all the elms and maples will have donned their full, rustling robes. When summer unrolls these opening leaves, we must bid adieu to the three steeples that spire behind them, to

the great, shapely dome, and the statue of the blessed warrior on his spirited steed. But even then, within many a gap, will rise clustered smoke-stacks and gables of distant houses; and these, wrapped in hazy vapors and blending with the dim horizon, shall seem to be the towers and battlements of unseen castles, "bosomed high in tufted trees," and looking down upon us from lofty steeps.

Higher than trees or house-tops is a realm, fairer, to our thinking, than all the sights that lie beneath it. The hints of spring that we behold in city streets can only tantalize us with dreams of richer beauty budding in grassy fields; but over our head stretches the same radiant canopy, brimming with color and light, that is spread above country hillsides. Birds wheel as gladly through its spaces as if they looked down over lake and forest; and upon the trees of the Common the sun shines as brightly as if their trunks were set in damp meadows and surrounded by sleepy kine. This airy dome is beyond the power of man to change. His furnaces may send up into it the

smoke of their torment, but the rising columns break at once into misty wreaths, that vanish in rainbow tints and curves of dissolving grace.

To appreciate in a city this beauty of the sky, one must live on a level with the tree-tops and above imprisoning walls. The traditional garret of the scribbler and poetaster can be dreary enough, no doubt, when its outlook is bounded by chimney-pots and dingy roofs; but when it ignores all limits of the earth, and fronts squarely upon the glowing, varying heavens, its occupant may well count himself one of the blest. Here at our ingleside we sit, and gaze straight away into cloudland, with a free sweep, east and west, to the far horizon, and nothing between us and the distant houses but a wilderness of boughs. Grovelling mortals in shaded drawing-rooms forget that such things as new moons and sunsets exist in a metropolis; but the sky above us is ever present and glorious, whether it flushes with fine braveries of color, or shows a wide arch of troubled vapors, and great blackening thunderheads trailing their dark fringes athwart the silvery grays.

In these breezy days, when the blue is kept clear and lustrous by shower and sun, and fleecy cloudlets sail leisurely along in some aerial current, we seem to share their dreamy motion, and to hold our course with them serenely towards the east; or we soar and dip and curvet with the swift swallow, who slants his wings and shows his gleaming breast as he wheels far away under the billowy dome. Then we recall our childhood's dream of heaven, when we fancied the beatitude of bliss to consist in swinging in a rocking-chair that was well balanced on summer clouds, with a heap of new novels rising beside us, and an exhaustless supply of pecan-nuts in our apron-pockets. This does not strike us as bad even now; though we might wish to add thereto another rocking-chair and another reader somewhere within hailing distance.

At night we scarcely note the stars sparkling above; for, far and wide, through the boughs of the Common and Garden, there gleam a hundred flashing lights, larger and brighter than any the sky can show. Though we know them to be

fixed upon lamp-posts in all the paths and surrounding streets, only their fires are visible, and these encompass the scene like a zodiac of fallen planets. And on winter evenings what weird splendors have flamed up over the stars where that quaint yellow belfry swings its broad vane against the sky! There the northern lights have held their airy revels, streaming up from a solid bank of radiance in quivering ribbons of light, or waving in broad sheets to the very zenith, like luminous banners blown in a wind, while we could almost hear the snap and flutter of their sudden shifting. On chilly nights these strange pyrotechnics may still be seen, but their finest displays are over for the season. The constellations look down now through a calm, dewy air; and by day the horizon wears something of the misty loveliness of summer. Already it shines deliciously soft in the long afternoons; and at sunset the light sparkles warm and red on the glass of the Park Street steeple, and glares and glances from the gilded pepper-box upon the State House dome; and then the last rays forsake the tree-tops, and fade away from the limitless spaces of azure.

Curious neighbors we have; but they are chirrupy little fellows, who sit in the topmost boughs, and do nothing more annoying than to tip sly winks to us now and then, as if to imply that they knew a thing or two about our affairs, but could be relied upon to keep it to themselves. Their number increases every day; but they have never quite left us in the worst of weather. We have seen a flock of these jolly little beggars hopping and twittering in the bushes in December; and though it was none of our business, we could not help wondering in what place they found their suppers and dinners, and under what coverlets they slept o' nights. The doves are always here, sweeping past on broad wings that darken the window in their rapid flight. Long before their wonted time the robins came, — so early, indeed, that many a flirt of snow has stopped their nest-repairing, and sent them off shivering with the blues. They have arrived now in full force. Crossing the Common the other morning, we counted twenty-four burly chaps in their best red waistcoats, foraging in the low ground for their

breakfast; and the chatter and clamor that wake us at dawn seem to proceed from numberless throats. In their well-regulated households all the family scolding is evidently administered at daybreak; and on cloudy mornings the dose appears to be unusually severe. There is one nest, swinging over the sidewalk on a low branch, that is still without its occupants. It might have been built in many a retired, verdurous nook; but there it is, rocking in the breeze, just over the heads of hurrying mortals. We look every day for the arrival of some gorgeous couple from Baltimore, — a pair of golden-breasted orioles, who shall proceed to set up their northern housekeeping for the summer in the most approved style.

But no birds that return to us after winter storms have been more welcome than the swans. We had long missed them from the segment of blue lake that is visible from our window; for there they were wont to take their stately airings so long as the waters flowed. We delighted to watch them on autumn mornings, sailing slowly along in single file, at equal distances apart, with

necks arched at the same graceful angle, and conscious dignity in their bearing, as if they had ranged themselves at starting with an eye to effect, and were out on a dress parade. Their breasts seemed to glide over the waves without effort, borne along by the light wind that scarcely rumpled the down of their feathers; and occasionally their wings, white and beautiful as sculptured marble, were half lifted to catch the favoring breeze. Such a picture on glassy waters Wordsworth must have seen when he wrote the lines, —

> "The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
> Float double, swan and shadow."

When winter's frost turned the liquid of the pond into a sheet of ice, this fair armada put into port. A darting throng of skaters skimmed the hard surface, but the swans were not.

After long hibernating somewhere in their small, dark dwellings, they were discovered a few weeks ago drifting across the blue gap between the poplar-trees, as lustrously white and as haughty as ever. Their full-dress parades are abandoned for the present, perhaps from a lack of drill induced

by long housing; and they move without state, in detachments of two or three. When these voyages are ended, the green bank invites them; and there they are pleased to stand, pluming their feathers, or lost in silent contemplation. The black swan, who mostly keeps by himself, conscious, it may be, that he suffers by comparison with his fairer brethren, buries his scarlet bill in the down of his ebon breast, and dreams the while of his native Hamburg or the sedgy shores of Baltic seas.

Can it be that swans ever sing? Travellers in Iceland have spoken of their tuneful lays; and the common saying that the swan's dying song is the sweetest would imply that he warbled many earlier strains. Yet were a melodious carol to rise suddenly from that bevy of feathered beauties, when at any time we stood admiring them upon the margin of the pond, we should start with as much surprise as if one of the neighboring statues — like the Commandant's in "Don Giovanni" — had opened its lips and addressed us. It must be that all the swans we have seen were born deaf and dumb. None of them were ever heard to

attempt a roundelay during their lives, and we feel sure that they will die and give no sign. And according to the doctrine of compensations, they should not sing. Clothed in majestic loveliness, they need no other charm; but it concerns us to know whence they have gained their musical reputation.

TAKING A TURKISH BATH.

WHEN Medea promises to restore our aged frames to fresh youth and beauty, we may not distrust her magic powers; but, surmising how much she will need to hew and hack the poor limbs, and how hot must be the seething caldron, we naturally shrink from delivering ourselves over to the hands of the sorceress.

Enthusiastic writers, who hailed the importation of the Turkish Bath to our American shores as a national gain, penned many glowing rhapsodies on the beatitudes of feeling and rejuvenation of strength which it induces, and were prone to insist upon it as the first duty of man that he should go straightway to its waters and be healed. But in the years that have elapsed since then, this mode

of ablution has ceased to demand public attention, and it has at length quietly taken its place as one of the foreign luxuries that are indispensable to the few, and almost unknown to the many. Whether they doubt its beneficial effects, or shrink from its rigorous treatment, its varied processes still remain something of a mystery and a dread to the majority of our people.

To satisfy the curiosity of such of our sisters as hesitate to test its merits for themselves, we will describe the methods by which its pretended marvels are wrought, leaving the question of its curative properties to be decided by those more competent to judge.

In the early days of its establishment among us, the apartments prepared for this novel bath were the resort of inexperienced patrons, who knew nothing of what was in store for them, beyond vague impressions derived from books of Eastern travel. Hither, then, we come, a merry party of novices, resolved to meet bravely whatever awaits us, and, if need be, to perish together. We are ushered into an ordinary sitting-room, presided

over by a smiling goddess; and at her behest we first register our names and abiding-place. This strikes us as a thoughtful provision; for in case we never come out alive, it will be a comfort to our friends to see where we last booked ourselves. Then we pass to an inner apartment, surrounded with curtained stalls, like those found in ice-cream saloons. Into these the goddess distributes us, depositing with each a folded sheet, and informing us all that we are to present ourselves in this array as soon as may be. One by one we come forth from the little dens; but in spite of the classic air which we have tried to impart to the trailing folds, and the severe simplicity in which we have skewered up our locks, after the style of antique Greek drawings, our appearance fails to be impressive. Peals of laughter, sudden and long, greet each recruit that joins the waiting band; for the sudden transformation from becrimped, bepanniered, beruffled little dames, into lank, melancholy spectres shrouded in white, is irresistibly comic and exhilarating. We take up a line of march, and pass solemnly across the sitting-room which we had

entered upon arriving, and note its straight, cane-seated lounges, set end to the wall. These were empty when we first beheld them; but it cheers us to discover there now a row of chubby-faced, frowsy damsels rolled up in warm blankets, and looking like fresh little mummies just waked up. Though their eyes twinkle contagiously as the ghostly procession files before them, we move on silently to our fate. The goddess glides before us, and, at a door mysteriously shut, rings an unseen bell. When we halt we find she has vanished.

The door opens, springs behind us, and admits us all into a new domain. The being who opened the door may be mermaid, naiad, or siren; but she is certainly of the Irish persuasion, with a great air of health, good-nature, and despatch about her. We step down to a tiled floor, warm to the touch; the mermaid flashes water on our heads, and lays there a folded towel, wet enough to drip constantly over our eyes. This done, she remarks blithely that we are to remain here till called for, perhaps twenty minutes, and disappears. We survey the small room, furnished only with a cane-

seated lounge and a few hard chairs, and inclosed on one side by dark, floating curtains, scant and faded. No oriental magnificence here, surely. We grow conscious that this is a hot region; calm breathing is no easy matter, and the perspiration starts over us in great beads. Even the light covering which we hug about us soon becomes a burden; and that towel, — limp, heavy, and wet, it pitches over our face at every motion, or shelves off sideways, or rushes down behind to the hot tiles; and in vain we place it straight and square, after the manner of Italian peasants, and strive to bear our head erect. It is difficult to be statuesque, with the mercury passing a hundred.

Soon a spirit of adventure possesses us; we lift the curtain that conceals one end of the room, and wander into a larger section beyond, where the floor is much hotter and the thermometer on the wall says 120°. The storehouse of the caloric appears to be closed ovens in the opposite wall; and thence the tremulous tides of hot air radiate. It is heroic to attempt an approach to that solid masonry; we cannot sit composedly in the atmosphere about us;

so, crossing our arms, we pace back and forth, like Napoleon at St. Helena, but feeling more like a watermelon in a state of violent perspiration. It occurs to us that no sound from without has reached us since we entered; and when, pray, was that? The mermaid has forgotten us; or she has lured us to our destruction, and escaped through that curtained door. Probably she has never read Dante, or she would have written over the entrance, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." Shall we set up cries for help? No one will hear them. Suddenly, from the unseen region beyond, there issue sharp sounds, so resonant, so frequent, so plainly untempered by mercy, that we stop on the threshold of a joke, gaze into each other's eyes, and tremble. Then all is still as before. Is the victim dead?

Soon the curtained door opens; the mermaid peeps through, smiling and at ease, as if nothing had happened, and motions one of us to approach. We look volumes of farewell messages at those we leave behind, and vanish with her. Another and a smaller room, with floor dripping with

water, but decidedly cooler. Parallel curtains divide it into several sections; and in each of these an oblong marble slab is horizontally set upon a raised structure of brick, looking for all the world like some tomb-tablet from an old churchyard, scrubbed up and taken in-doors. Here, then, the poor victims are buried. But we are now so reduced in circumstances, so hopelessly in her power, so passive and ignorant, that we never think of resisting the mermaid. She takes ruthlessly the last woven relic of civilization to which we had clung; and upon a marble slab, like the sculptured figures at Westminster Abbey, we are laid. A great sponge passes over us, cool and fresh; then a mass of cocoanut fibre goes scraping up and down, and covers us with soapy lather. Then begin the pounding and rubbing, the kneading of joints and muscles, till our sensations are like those a batch of dough must experience when undergoing transformation into a pan of biscuit. When we think to ask the mermaid what harm we ever did her that she should treat us so, she begins to beat a quick tattoo up

and down our whole body with her doubled fists; and this was the sound which terrified us from afar. But while she is pommelling us to a jelly, and cracking all our bones, we cannot but admire the dexterity with which she does it; and she has so sweet a Dublin brogue in the few words she utters, and her smile is so cheery, that we feel tempted to forgive her.

Next she leads us over the soppy floor; and before we can well part our sea-weed locks to take an observation of the outer world, driving over us comes a great power of water, warm at first, then colder, sweeping us from crown to foot; and we know not whence it comes nor whither it goes, only we are sure that it takes us on its way. We think with pity of the little marble nymph under a fountain-jet in the Public Garden; but, considering how much of such treatment that poor young woman endures, it is to be hoped that she enjoys it more.

That we may go through all the variations, we step finally into a tank of water on the floor-level, which looks suspiciously broad and dark; but we

grasp the mermaid's hand, and she brings us safely to land again.

And now we have had our bath; so we are dried with towels, a blessing is flung over us in the shape of a thick blanket, the bell is rung above the door, and there we stand, — a returned ghost, waiting to be welcomed back to the land of the living.

The goddess greets us; on her hard lounges we repose, and these seem now the most luxurious of couches. We wish we could be sure of lying still for a day, so delightful is it to rest and rest. It may be we are not poetical, but none of the fabled visions visit our fancy here. We are ready to behold gorgeous curtains ablaze with crescents, low divans, with guitars leaning against silken cushions, the sparkling play of fountains, swarthy slaves in baggy trousers and slippers with toes inclined to curl, turbaned pachas sitting cross-legged on carpets and smoking long pipes that stand before them, — but we fail to do it. There is not even a sense of exhilaration. We expected to feel strong as a lion and winged like the eagle, but are

only fatigued and exhausted. In this we all agree; and, being women, we sigh for a cup of tea, and even form dark designs of defying our temperance friends and procuring a bottle of wine before we come hither again.

Though the promised visions and the physical rejuvenation appear to us moonshine, we do feel repaid by the sense of utter cleanliness which possesses us. We are conscious that we retain as little of the old Adam as is consistent with mortal life; and our faces are radiant with a clearer complexion and more spiritual light than ever shone there before. When again we come to taste this luxury of abounding purity, we shall tread confidently the steps over which we have shuddered so absurdly.

We rise with dread to reclothe ourselves in earthly habiliments; and when we step out into the garish light of the street, where horse-cars are rattling past and dusty travellers hurrying by, we feel like visitants from another sphere, worthy to be greeted with "All hail, bright spirits increate!"

OUR MINOR RIGHTS.

THERE are certain rights belonging to us as individuals which legislation fails to recognize, but which we claim for ourselves as essential to happiness and comfort. They concern the minor matters of life, and are founded only upon courtesy and a mutual forbearance; yet we regard them not as favors and privileges graciously extended by our neighbors but as the just demands which all members of society are expected to make upon each other. When they are denied, we consider ourselves wronged, though we can look for no redress, and may not even acquaint the offender with our displeasure. These lesser claims cannot, then, be enforced; they must be conceded if they are had at all; they are rights

that a man may know, and knowing dare not maintain. But no surer test of refinement, or even of kindly imagination, can be found than the recognition accorded to these undefined claims.

A good American authority declares the pursuit of happiness to be one of our inalienable rights; and this statement justifies us in requiring that no man shall inflict upon our senses the indulgence of his own disagreeable tastes.

You go down to the dinner-table at your hotel. Opposite you is discovered a portly dowager, gorgeous in lace and diamonds, who sits waiting for her dessert; and, as she waits, she diverts herself by swinging slowly back and forth a sandal-wood fan. The scented breeze it creates floats into your very nose; and since you are possessed of a delicate organization, and have an especial dislike to this odor, you feel at once as faint as death. But what can you do? Being already established in your seat, you dislike to create a scene by asking to be placed elsewhere; so you remain and bear it. But from that hour you cherish in your breast

an intense dislike of the dowager. You believe that she has no sensibilities, that her perceptions are obtuse, and that she is too conceited to suspect that any act of hers could fail to bestow pleasure upon an admiring world. You are sure, ever after, that it is her children who are screaming up and down the hall; and that it is her daughter who sets her door ajar at the witching hour of ten P. M., and proceeds to dash off rollicking bravuras, crazy waltzes, and triumphant jubilates, for the space of sixty mortal minutes. Vainly at that hour do you endeavor to coax yourself to sleep. Your soul swells with indignation that your health, your comfort, your indisputable rights, should be so recklessly ignored. When marauding cats begin to howl their mournful duets under your window, you hurl at them all the old psalm-books within reach, and there is a cessation of hostilities for a while; but if one small volume were sent spinning never so tenderly against this nightingale's door, you would be held up to all the house as an unfeeling brute, and perhaps deservedly so. In your gathering wrath,

you feel yourself liable at any moment to fling wide your own door, and sing out, "Thunder and Mars, let us have peace!" But the reflection that even this protest would be utterly drowned by the melodious tempest raging within fortunately restrains you. At length it ends, as do all things save eternity. In the morning you descend, pale and haggard, and take the only revenge allowed you, which consists in looking particular daggers at the nocturnal fiend, as she sits before you at her breakfast. But she eats her muffin so composedly, and droops her eyelashes with such an elegant, nonchalant air, that you become convinced she is taking your pointed glances as the dazed stare of admiration. The next evening the door is opened wider, the piano is more demonstrative, the singing more exultant; and there is no longer a doubt that the deluded performer fancies you hanging with breathless interest upon every note. You are fairly checkmated. It is true that, as a hearing and sleeping being, you have rights which others are bound to respect; but if they do not, the offence is not

actionable. The only choice allowed you is to submit or to quit the field.

After certain hours of the night, every man thinks himself justified in demanding a reasonable degree of quiet in the world without. The old Norman conqueror rung his curfew a little earlier than we do ours; but soon after nine o'clock it is expected that good citizens will betake themselves homeward, or, at all events, that the sound of their footsteps and the roll of their carriage-wheels will be the only indications of a later progress. Noisy demonstrations at such times we resent as unwarrantable; but yet we pause on the threshold of sleep to hear the merry ring of young voices as they pass below, trolling some tender refrain, and even murmur, "God bless you, my boys!" as the chime of their notes and their well-timed footfalls die away. We forgive much to happy youth and to hearts beating together in brotherly good-will. And the old oysterman sends out his late cries of "Oy, oy!" upon the startled midwinter air without any resentment arising in our hearts; for though we note the regular swell and vanishing

of his voice for a couple of squares, as he approaches and then recedes, we picture what an uncomfortable time he must be having out there in the bitter blast, while the rest of the world lies snug under warm coverlets with the day's work completed, and we conclude that if he endures it we can. We do not know if a deep, sonorous voice be held indispensable to such oystermen, but all we ever heard have advertised their bivalves, not, like Mrs. Browning's reading of Greek, "somewhat low for ai's and oi's," but with a power and resonance that were surprising. We remember one such voice that haunted for years the streets of a certain old seaport town at night; and it rings still in our memory with wonderful depth and fulness, fit to rival the notes of any *basso profundo* on operatic boards.

It is the people who come shrieking along before daylight that receive the fiercest anathemas of awakened slumberers. When the venders of edibles and small wares and the repairers of household utensils send up their unseasonable matins, we are roused from our last delightful

nap to a realizing sense that the hungry, work-a-day world is at our doors again. We feel wronged that our repose should be thus lightly sacrificed, and make it an additional charge against the metropolitan police that it does not send all such itinerant venders packing. Who are they, that they should rob us of our rest with this hawking of superfluous wares, making for themselves a few cents betimes, and saving the payment of shop-rent, at the expense of the quiet and sleep of a whole town? By their noisy briskness we seem reproached for indolent repose, and urged to rise before our time and join the workers already astir. Even if the result were desirable, we should decidedly object to the means. We claim that to each man belongs the privilege of setting his own alarm-clock.

The proper limits of individual freedom on sidewalks and highways need to be more explicitly defined. "Keep to the right in passing" is almost the only maxim to regulate the hurrying throngs who push and nudge and jostle each other upon our busy thoroughfares; and even this rule varies

in different countries, so that in Canada we find both man and beast turning always to the left. Yet, as citizens, we have a conceded right to unobstructed passage upon the public street; and on crowded sidewalks the comfort of all demands that each one shall move at the average pace, and that nobody shall spread himself laterally, with arms akimbo, to the annoyance of his neighbors. The day of the long street-dress, we may hope, has forever gone by, and with it much provocation to internal rage on the part of unwary followers; but we still find men carrying pet canes under their arms, which project behind at a horizontal level, to the imminent risk of all eyes that approach within their sweep. Now and then enthusiastic friends, encountering each other, come to a dead halt in the midst of this flowing tide of humanity, and leave the arrested currents in the rear to eddy around and pass on as best they may. A man is also infringing upon the rights of others when he smokes his cigar upon the public street, since he leaves behind him a train of nauseous fumes which those who follow are forced to

breathe with disgust. Hereafter, when the comfort of pedestrians shall be more fully respected, the law of public opinion, when no written law exists, will forbid this practice on crowded thoroughfares, and also the vile habit of making the pavement beneath our feet unclean with tobacco-juice. No rules can be applied to passengers in a horse-car; for when they enter that form of conveyance they manifestly surrender thereby all right to the enjoyment of life, liberty, and happiness.

If we buy a ticket to any entertainment, we understand that we buy with it a right to hear the lecturer or singer undisturbed; but there are always the people who come bustling in half an hour after the performance has begun, not looking abashed and mortified, as if they would crave forgiveness of the audience for thus violating their duty towards it, but sailing down with calm assurance to their seat in the central aisle, where they settle themselves with as much whirr and rustle as a flock of pigeons would make in alighting. And behind us are the groups of chattering girls, gen-

erally accompanied by one half-witted boy, whose presence has set his fair admirers into all this flutter and gigglement, which drowns effectually every delicate note from the stage. We cannot arrest such people, we cannot order them to start *instanter;* we have only to sit and hide our indignation, like a smouldering volcano.

Whatever regulation the common sense of mankind regards as just becomes a recognized law, though it may have no support from the statute-books. Thus we are bound to keep an engagement punctually, and to apologize if it is not kept, because every man rates his time as too precious to be wasted by another; and the duties which rights imply lead us to tender cheerfully to others the punctilious observances which we claim for ourselves.

Many of the annoyances of life spring merely from a lack of refinement and culture in the people about us. The woman who appears abroad in a scarlet dress and crimson shawl may cause us all to wish that such an offence against the sight were punishable by imprisonment for a term of days;

but until her eye is trained to perceive the harmony of colors, her more artistic neighbors will remain completely at her mercy. It is not enough that men be well disposed: their perceptions and imaginations must be cultivated before they can readily apprehend the conditions of another's happiness and the requirements of his life. Then, and then only, may we expect that these minor rights will be everywhere respected. The Golden Rule itself cannot insure a just and kindly treatment of others, unless they who practise it are sufficiently enlightened to desire for themselves whatever is noblest and best.

THE TRIALS OF VISITING.

PROBABLY no man imagines what a bundle of habits and weaknesses he is, what a craven slave to routine and creature comforts, until he starts off on a visit. At home, the surroundings which he has gradually moulded to his pleasure, the petty customs which his whims have instituted, seem so natural and unvarying that he never suspects them to be the outgrowth of peculiarities, or even of positive tastes. It takes but little, he fancies, to make him happy anywhere: were he at Rome, he would do as the Romans do; but when he gets there he finds it to be no easy matter. Then the atmosphere of his own little world proves to be the only one which he can inhale without effort; in any other he gasps for breath.

We are never conscious of this peculiarity of our personal needs when we are sojourning at hotels. There, if the arrangements about us do not appear at first glance to our liking, the ring of a bell changes them all, and we quickly forget that they were ever different. But when we visit the house of a friend we enter the domain of an absolute ruler, whose regulations must be accepted without criticism or change. We are sure that the purpose of his heart is to render us supremely happy; and as guests we feel in honor bound to appear so. What misery and secret suffering this duty imposes we all know too well, though it may be that we seldom confess it.

It is only after the first evening has passed in happy greetings and social delight, the last good-night been carolled over the balusters, and we have retired to the solitude of our rooms, that we begin to realize the strangeness of our surroundings. Thoreau said that a farm-house in his town which he had never before visited was as strange and interesting to him as the Kingdom of Dahomey; and this chamber appears a Dahomey to us. As

we survey it, something akin to the dreary desolation which smote us the first time that we were left at school comes back once more; but then we mourned for bright smiles and kind words, the warmth and cheer which we had lost: now we are dismayed at the lack of mere material comforts. Years have made us sordid and practical; it is our own easy-chair, our own mattress and corpulent pillows, that memory invests at this hour with so rosy a charm.

The unfamiliar aspect of all about us forebodes only breakers ahead. But we conclude to await developments; and developments soon come. From the first the bed wore the suspicious look of a huge cushion; and now our worst fears are realized. While its feathers surround us in puffy billows, we try to recall all we have read of death by suffocation; and then we wonder if Desdemona found it an easy one, — poor soul! A sense of oppression leads to further discoveries: we are walled in by cotton comforters; and the shrunken pillows, set on end, still keep our head on a down-grade. This might be borne if fresh air were to be had;

but full, heavy curtains drape the windows to such a degree that the discouraged breeze makes no attempt to enter. The only way to lift the aforesaid curtains that suggests itself to our disordered mind is to thrust jackknives through their folds and pinion them to the side wall; but we are not quite desperate enough for that. To add to our discomfiture, a strong odor of gas steals upon us; and just then we remember that there were no matches in sight; so that, in any alarm of fire, we should probably perish from bewilderment. Altogether, the universe seems out of joint.

Finally,—such is the endurance of the human frame,—we sink into slumber; and all night long we are buffeting, in our dreams, the billows of a heaving sea. But when we descend next morning, and a sweet-voiced friend asks in a complaisant tone, "How did you rest, my dear?" can we be cruel enough to say, "Abominably! I am just alive"? That would relieve our feelings; but, instead, we tell graceful lies, and assure our conscience that they are of the whitest.

Then arises anew within our heart the strong wish that sincerity in this world were possible. How it would simplify life, — how much happier we should all be! For instance, in accepting this kind invitation, if we could only have written: "My dear Cousin, — Your persuasions are quite irresistible! I hope to be with you on Tuesday. I sleep on hair mattresses, with woollen blankets; shall desire an abundance of air, water, coarse towels, and by no means Castile soap. Does your gas-pipe leak? How my heart bounds to meet you! Yours devotedly."

We are sure that if every housekeeper would at least make it a point to sleep in the guest-chamber once each season, these discomforts would, in a measure, be remedied. The beds would not then be found uncomfortable, the furniture ill-arranged, the curtains unmanageable; the mirror would no longer hang over the stove, or the lounge extend between gusty windows. We resolve that nobody shall ever suffer the same at our kindly hands; not foreseeing that hereafter this cousin shall come to sojourn in our own happy domicile, and shall

then agonize on flat couches, and wonder if bed and board were meant to be synonymous terms.

On awaking next morning it occurs to us that it would be sensible for private families to advertise to strangers within their gates the hours for meals, in plain sight upon the door-panels, after the manner of hotels. For we hear a bell tinkling below stairs; and, having forgotten to inquire concerning the household regulations, we are in doubt whether it summons us to shake off dewy slumber or to betake ourselves into the presence of the coffee-urn. Always hoping for the best, we consult our convenience, and go at length down to find the mutton-chops cold, the griddle-cakes fast turning into leather, and the family grouped around the fire, awaiting our advent in smiling patience.

During the day our friend's friends call upon us; and we are civil to a degree, accept their little tea-parties, and are only too happy to be sacrificed in the cause. But these tea-parties threaten to be the death of us; since every house-

keeper, for some occult reason, considers her honor at stake in giving to her guests the strongest tea it is possible to make; and although we may suggest a change, it comes back as black as ever. We drink it knowing that every spoonful costs us half an hour of "nature's sweet restorer." Then we must taste all the cake, and never break it; and must listen patiently to recipes for its manufacture, if we have been indiscreet enough to pronounce it delicious; though in five minutes we could not tell whether the yolks or the whites of the eggs are beaten for the frosting.

After the days of pleasant converse, the calls and tea-fights lose their charm, we grow weary of being so persistently entertained, and fancy ourselves in a delightful jail, with loving friends for keepers. We miss our freedom; it irks us that our movements are all watched, even by the kindliest eyes. Man may be a gregarious animal, but he must escape from the flock sometimes, to get a taste of silence and solitude. If, however, we retire behind closed doors to enjoy awhile the luxury of being alone, our friends suspect us of homesick-

ness, and only redouble their attentions when we rejoin the family circle.

The necessity of being always in the blandest humor is really a tax upon one of moderate capacities. Some natures appear to be made up of sugar and sunshine, but they are few. It wears upon most people to be amiable day in and day out, to speak always in a company voice, to have no plans or desires beyond another's pleasure; and we feel hypocritical in donning a mask of such smiling serenity.

In the evening, after remaining an hour beside the piano, where our little cousin has been pouring out in melodious strains her full repertory of familiar ballads, we catch sight of the evening paper, and would fain seize it then and there and make off to a sofa-corner, that we might ascertain if the official returns of the state election are yet in, how well Gladstone succeeds in carrying his last measure, and what new complications have arisen in the East. But though the music is not entrancing, and the interludes of conversation fail to engross our thought, we are aware that good

manners compel us to keep resolutely to the entertainment provided.

When, finally, the days of our visit have come to an end, and we return to our own vine and fig-tree, what a comfortable spot it seems! We never suspected till now that a plain house on a back street could be like the Garden of Eden. Having set foot on the native heather of our hall-carpet, we are in harmony with the universe again. We are monarch of all we survey, and go up and down surveying, with hands in our pockets, and whistling "Home, Sweet Home." Howard Payne must have been on a visit before he wrote that. The match-boxes are just where they should be, the tongs lean in their accustomed place, and all secret springs of action in windows and window-shades lie revealed to our inner sight.

If we must ever again depart from under our own roof-tree, it shall only be when we can take our ease in our inn. We enjoy the society of friends, and love them as well as ever; but if we must martyr ourselves for their sakes, let it be at a dash, in one impetuous act, which shall crown

us with heroism, — anything but agonizing through a series of petty discomforts, of which we cannot complain, and to endure which brings us neither credit nor renown.

AN EVENING'S ADVENTURE AT THE DEACON HOUSE.

IF you were one of the thousand curious visitors who were permitted to examine the wonders of the Deacon House, previous to the public sale of its furniture and contents a week ago, you must have noticed a picture that hung there in the library, above an old, richly carved cabinet, and which was set down in the catalogue as a Delilah, by Rubens. It represented the upturned face of a woman, so strikingly beautiful, with its Grecian outline and warm, clear coloring, that the most careless could not easily forget it.

This picture had charmed a wealthy lady, who was admitted to a private view of the house before it was thrown open to the great crowd of ticket-

holders; but as she had then no reason to doubt that the painting was a veritable Rubens, and likely to command an immense price at the auction, she indulged no hope of obtaining it for herself. She resolved, however, upon procuring a copy, if this should be possible; and being a personal friend of some of the heirs of the property, she readily gained permission for any artist whom she might select to visit the house at all hours previous to the first day of the sale.

The artist chosen was none other than my intimate friend Jeannette, who had spent considerable time at copying, in the Louvre and other galleries, while pursuing her art education abroad, and whose skill in such painting had begun to attract attention from connoisseurs. She liked the task that was given her, and set immediately about it; but owing to the constant throngs of sight-seers that filled the rooms day after day, she was restricted to a few hours of the early morning and one of the late afternoon for her work. She became ambitious to produce an exact and finished copy; and the last afternoon preceding the sale

found her with some hours' labor yet to be added before she could regard the picture as complete.

On the morning of that day she came to me to ask if I would be willing to remain with her at the house from four o'clock, when the crowd would be gone, until such time in the early evening as her work would permit her to leave, saying that her brother, who had intended to keep her company there, was but just now obliged to leave town unexpectedly, and she must rely upon me. I readily consented, glad of so pleasant an opportunity to study at my leisure the many rare objects of interest that I had seen there on a hurried visit the previous day.

Her plans, as she informed me, were already made. The doorkeeper in charge, who was directed to afford her every assistance in his power, had allowed her to make what arrangement she chose; and to avoid the trouble and responsibility of keeping and delivering up the keys of the hall-door and the great gate, we were to find egress through the rear entrance of the house, where a door opened upon a court, and was fastened only

by a spring-lock. There, as she had arranged, a carriage was to come for us at a certain hour, and wait until we should appear with the finished painting. As the daylight would soon leave that eastern room where she must work, a supply of candles was to furnish light when needed; and these were to be set in the chandelier, made for such means of illumination, and which hung, fortunately, so as to throw a strong, full light upon the picture. This friend Jeannette is an energetic little body, and forgets nothing; for in all the journeys and labors into which her art-studies have led her, she has been used to looking out for herself.

By means of the pass provided, I obtained admission to the house at the appointed hour, and found my friend already in the library, making ready with brushes and palette, and impatient for the people to be gone. She had not long to wait. The stately policemen, who had stood on guard all day in the different rooms, soon cleared them of their occupants, and then departed themselves; the auctioneer's clerks, who had been verifying their

lists for the next day's sale, went their ways; and, finally, the trusty doorkeeper, after seeing that all windows were secure, came to announce that he was ready to go, and that he should now deliver the house into our care, charging us to see that the door opening upon the court was firmly closed whenever we should leave. We went down to it, to make sure that it was all right; and when we saw the keeper depart, locking the hall-door behind him, and swinging the gates together and fastening them with a great noise, we rejoiced that we had at length the house to ourselves.

We thought best, however, to make a hurried tour of the rooms, to see that nobody had been left behind, and that everything was as it should be, before we settled down to the evening's work. So, gliding up the broad oaken staircase, past the white marble vase on the landing, and the great square of Gobelin tapestry stretched upon the high wall, we reached the gallery above, and then traversed the empty chambers, peering hastily, as we went, behind the damask curtains that shrouded the beds, and into all corners and closets, after the manner of women

when out upon such exploring expeditions. Then, descending, we glanced through open doors into the grand cordon of gorgeous apartments that constituted the ground floor, thronged a few moments ago with bustling crowds, but now as orderly, as silent and deserted, as if nothing had occurred during the past week to disturb the hush and gloom that had reigned there for twenty long years.

Once more in the library, I busied myself with looping back the heavy velvet curtains from the windows, that no ray of light might be lost; while my companion seated herself at her easel, before the glorious Delilah, and was soon absorbed in her work. The face and shoulders of her copy were already finished, and wonderfully like, but the drapery was still only in outline. Not to disturb her, I proceeded quietly to examine the contents of our room. It was not an attractive apartment. You remember the dull, dark paper, the dingy green velvet draperies, the demoralized steel chandelier. The great picture of the ascending archangel, beside the carved fire-frame, was not cheerful to contemplate; neither was a large and very un-

pleasant-looking soup-plate, fastened to the wall, said to be of majolica, and attributed, from some old spite perhaps, to Caffagido. Several ancient breastplates and shields, girt about with divers diabolical weapons, appeared above the bookcases, beyond my reach. To inspect the mineral-case was to stand in Jeannette's precious light; and some magnificent wood-carving, which I remembered as adorning the panels of a cabinet, and a number of curious old miniatures, were all placed directly under the Rubens picture, and therefore too near the artist to admit of close examination.

I resolved to extend my observations to the other rooms, particularly as I wished to study the Sêvres china, about which I had been informing myself since my first visit. After setting up the candles in the shaky chandelier, preparatory to a grand illumination when their light should be needed, I informed my friend that I was just starting out on a tour of observation and discovery through the lower rooms.

"Perhaps," I added, "I may come across a comfortable-looking sofa on the way, and con-

clude to take a little nap on my own account; so don't mind if I fail to put in an appearance for the next hour. I shall be here in a twinkling, whenever you want me. Just whistle and I'll come unto you, my love;" and, laughing, I departed, closing the door behind me, but going back to tell Jeannette to be sure to draw the thick curtains well together, and to shut both doors tightly, if she should touch off the candles before my return, otherwise the unusual light in the deserted mansion might alarm the outer world. Promising, on my part, not to go beyond call, and on no account to stray off into the chambers above, I left her painting in the folds of Delilah's mantle as if minutes were never so precious.

I found myself, then, in the *salon*, which was curtained with yellow damask. Although the sun must have already set, the great parlors before me, stretched one beyond another in a gorgeous vista, were bright with numberless reflections from mirrors and candelabras, gilded panels, sheeny satins, and lustrous chandeliers. These rooms, which in the garish daylight, when filled with a jostling

crowd, had seemed to me furnished with nothing but splendid trumpery, appeared now, in their gathering shadows and soft, gleamy lights, truly palatial and superb. Their loneliness and silence were painfully impressive. No sound from the distant street penetrated their seclusion, for the house was built within a wide enclosure, and this was surrounded by a solid wall of brick; no steps echoed near me as I moved, for thick carpets muffled every sound; no ticking of a clock was heard, for every one standing on the glittering mantels had kept its hands fixed in the same spot for many a long year.

I halted a moment before the great Fragonard paintings set in the wall, to admire again those robustious young cherubs tumbling about in mid-air irrespective of all laws of gravity, and then stepped, not without a certain reverence, into the little boudoir where were gathered together the furniture and ornaments that had once belonged to a beautiful and ill-fated queen. In such a place and at such an hour I could not but indulge in a bit of quiet revery. In these very chairs Marie

Antoinette had sat, on these curtains of embroidered damask her hand had rested as she drew them back to gaze from her palace windows, and on this scarlet satin lounge she may have lain for a noontide siesta, after her charming peasant-play at Little Trianon. This exquisite jewel-box may have held the veritable diamond necklace over which she had cause to shed so many tears. Her husband's sister, the Princess Elizabeth, looked down from a medallion on the wall; and the Princess Lamballe seemed smiling straight into my eyes from under her rakish little hat. Certainly all three had bent some day over this centre-table to admire its inlaid Sêvres; and no doubt they studied with interest the portraits of themselves fixed in the backs of these tiny chairs. I gazed with delight at a painting of frolicsome cherubs balancing on a tree-bole, which hung over the door; and nearly dislocated my neck to inspect several others of the same race waltzing on the ceiling around the rod of a chandelier, whose graceful basket of golden lilies depended between a cloud of pinioned butterflies. What a pity,

thought I, that all the dainty furnishings of this pretty boudoir, after having been kept together for so many years, in fact ever since they were owned by the daughter of Maria Theresa, eighty odd years ago, must be scattered to-morrow to the four winds, under the hammer of an auctioneer!

I stepped out at length into the Montmorenci *salon*, all a-glitter with green and gold, and hurried across to the dining-room, to inspect the famous dishes there before it should be too dark to behold them well. The great paintings that covered the walls were fast sinking into gloom. Making my way to the case of marvellous china, which had been presented to the French queen as the gift of a city, I removed the glass frame that protected it, and lifting each cup from its niche in the satin case, examined at my leisure the exquisite paintings. Then I surveyed the Sêvres plates, with the portrait of a court beauty in the centre, the finger-bowls and wine-glasses of pale Bohemian that stood in the curious sideboard, and all the odd little tea-sets and ungainly dishes ranged around in the cases.

These plates and cups of fragile china had outlived the emperors and queens who had eaten and drunk from them at forgotten banquets, and even a generation or two of American republicans, after their time.

It was now so dark that I felt obliged to abandon further explorations and to put all things in order again. But I found it impossible to replace the heavy glass frame over the Sêvres service, so I left it on the floor till Jeannette could come to help me. Other and more mysterious hands, however, were destined to restore it to its proper place.

No sound had come from the library since I left it. Jeannette must be getting along famously, I thought; it was best not to disturb her. Coming back into the Montmorenci parlor, and remarking again what an eye that family had for splendor and gilding, I concluded to while away the time by taking a nap. So I brought two pieces of rich costuming from a number lying upon the billiard-table in the next room, that they might serve me as protection from the grow-

ing chilliness of the air, and made myself comfortable upon one of the green satin sofas that stood in a corner just opposite the door of the little boudoir. Truly, I muttered to myself, this is not bad. Ensconced in the *salon* of the Montmorencis, in sight of a queen's boudoir, with one of King Louis's waistcoats and the mantle of a Spanish grandee for wrappings, I may content myself for a while. Musing upon the days when these rooms were crowded with guests, the lights all ablaze, the windows open into a bower of blossoming plants, gentlemen clinking their wine-glasses and ladies fluttering their fans, I fell at length soundly asleep.

How long I remained there, I do not know; but when I awoke, it seemed to be from deep slumber, and everything around me stood enveloped in the gloom of night. It was not too dark, however, for me to see across the room where I lay, and dimly to discern the other apartments beyond. A wind had arisen since I slept; for there came to my ear a sound from without like the swaying of tree-boughs; and now and then a

fitful light stole into the window, flashing for an instant across the gilded panels, and gleaming from the hundred crystal pendants of a great chandelier. Then all grew dark as before. I knew that the moon was up, and struggling through a driving rack of clouds; though from where I lay I could see neither moon nor sky. The profound hush about me was only intensified by the sound of the wind and the steady dripping of the snow upon the conservatory roof.

I comprehended at once that I had overslept myself; and that my friend must, by this time, have finished her work and be ready to depart. But not a sound or a ray of light came through that distant library door. I was rising to make my way towards it, when a continuous noise arrested my attention, as regular as the snow-dropping, but much finer and nearer. I listened; it certainly was the ticking of a clock in this very room. A streak of moonlight that fell just then across the wall showed me the gilded hands of the mantel-clock in actual motion. This was so strange that I closed my eyes quickly and then

opened them wide, to convince myself that I was awake.

Soon the room was in shadow again, deeper than before, and the dial no longer visible; but the ticking continued. Rising on my elbow, I was proceeding to gather up the mantle which had fallen to the carpet, when I became conscious that in the boudoir opposite, behind the narrow, half-curtained doorway, a faint light was shining, — a light steadier than the moonlight and not so pale. No lamp was to be seen there; but, keeping silent and motionless, — for by this time I was lost in wonder at what all this could mean, — I was sure I heard a soft rustling, and then a noise like the opening of a box-lid or of a cabinet-door. Of course, I reflected, it can only be Jeannette, who has come in there with a candle, and is standing intent upon something beside the door. I called her name. Instead of a reply there was an instant hush. I strained my ears, but could hear nothing except the tick, tick of the clock, and the fancied echoes of my own voice dying away in the farthest rooms. For some moments this breathless

hush continued. Now, if my friend be playing me a trick I may as well discover it at once, thought I, making bold to advance toward the boudoir and learn for myself who this unseen occupant might be. But scarcely had I risen when the same sharp click struck upon my ear, as though a small door had been shut; and then the rustling began again. I held my breath in a wondering fear. Through the arch of the little curtained doorway, I could see the mantel-mirror that hung opposite; and into its depths there moved the reflection of something like an antique lamp, burning at the tip and held high by a white hand. A portion of the sleeve was visible at the wrist. This was no Jeannette: who else could be there? I sank back upon the sofa, incapable of any motion or thought save this,— that some other being besides ourselves was shut up in this dark, deserted mansion.

From a hidden corner near the doorway there now glided forth into the centre of the boudoir the figure of a woman, tall, and dressed in ancient fashion, with a rich, flowered brocade sweeping the floor and rustling as she went. Her face was not

visible, for she was moving away from me towards the mantel; and the tiny lamp glimmering above her head seemed to throw her figure beneath into soft shadow, whilst it cast a faint light around. She paused, as if surveying the two portraits on the wall before her; and then, while I was trembling lest some involuntary movement of mine should attract her attention, she passed suddenly out of sight, through a door communicating with another *salon* beyond. I watched intently for her reappearance; but she remained there a long while, without my being able to detect the slightest sound or flicker of light in the adjoining rooms.

The entrance-hall, containing the great staircase, occupied a remote corner of the house; and between it and the parlor, into which this being or vision had departed, stretched the billiard-room, which had been dim even at twilight, with its closed blinds; and now that no ray of the moon penetrated the other apartments, it was wrapped in darkness. While I was staring into its depths, and debating if I had not better attempt to pick my way through it and escape to the library,

the figure crossed my sight again, moving along the farthest side of the billiard-room in the direction of the hall. Her face, as I beheld it dimly in profile, — for the lamp was well-nigh extinguished, — shone pale and sad, and she looked straight before her as she walked; but just as she was passing from view, her eyes were turned full upon me, and then, raising her hand, she made a sweeping gesture toward the door. In an instant she had vanished; and the rustling sound seemed to die away upon the staircase. When it had wholly ceased, I flew to the room where, hours ago, I had left my friend.

And there I found the busy little maid, in the soft light of a dozen candles, wiping her brushes, and pointing triumphantly to her finished painting. She started at seeing the expression on my face, but soon burst into merry laughter; and before I could find breath to explain myself, dragged me in front of a mirror that I might behold the strange rig in which I was arrayed. An old-fashioned waistcoat, bespangled with silken pansies, into which I had thrust my arms before

taking the nap and which I had since forgotten, was buttoned well up to the chin; and a high collar, stiff with embroidery, was standing about my ears and threatening to engulf the chignon behind. Above this appeared a pallid face and eyes set wide. I had to smile in spite of the untold wonder I had seen; and, indeed, the brightly lighted room, the sight of Jeannette, and the sound of her merry voice, were wonderfully reassuring after my lonesome experience.

I first asked her if it were not nearly midnight; and she assured me that it was by no means so late as that, adding that it was plain I had been masquerading with ghosts out there, and had lost my wits. With some effort I related all I had seen. She only laughed the more, asserting that I had been half asleep, and that this strange being, whoever she might be, was only a creature of my imagining.

"Were you not conjuring up all kinds of fancies before you fell asleep?" she asked.

"Perhaps so," I rejoined; "but this was no dream, I am sure."

"But I have been awake all the while, and have heard nothing. I remember that my door opened suddenly in the early evening, without apparent cause; and I got up and looked out, but discovered only yourself fast asleep on a distant sofa. I closed it and returned to my work; but a moment after it opened wider than before. Then I concluded that a window was left open somewhere in the house, and that the wind, rising, had blown the door back. I shut it again, and thought no more about it. If your wandering, ladylike ghost came to look in upon me, I did not see her; and this house is not one of the kind to be haunted, for it has scarcely ever been inhabited by living people. But come," she added, "the carriage must have been waiting for us a long while. Put this out of your mind, and let us make ready to go."

I recollected the glass frame belonging over the Sèvres china, which I had left on the dining-room floor, and knew it must be replaced. Looking out, we saw that the rooms were now bright with moonlight, and together we started upon this errand. As we went by the clock in the Montmo-

renci *salon*, its hands were still in motion. On reaching the dining-room, the frame, which we had come to lift, appeared set in its proper place. I looked at my friend, and saw that she was beginning to share my amazement, but we said nothing. Passing near the hall-door on our return, I could not refrain from glancing up to the Gobelin tapestry that hung over the staircase; for it was lighted then by the full moon that shone through an unseen window on the gallery above. The central figure of Victory looked out, regal and smiling; but as we paused a moment to behold it, a shadow, like that of a woman, fell upon the broad picture, wavering and floating across from one side to the other, and then vanishing. Neither of us spoke a word as we returned to the library; but to take up the painting-case and canvas, extinguish and remove the candles, loop back the curtains, and depart to the flight of stairs leading down to the rear entrance, was the work of a few moments.

Through the side-lights we saw the carriage waiting; and there was our faithful Jehu, with his

blanketed horses drawn up to the door, and himself sitting motionless upon his box and half asleep in the shadow of the great house. Soon the outer door was closed tightly behind us, and we were whirling around the square into the lighted street. I glanced back at the mansion we had left; but the moon, freed from her clouds, was flooding its front with a peaceful light; and if any unearthly visitants were roaming then through the deserted chambers, no signs of disturbance appeared at their casements. The breeze had died away; and within the garden-wall the black shadows of leafless trees stretched motionless across the untrodden snow.

We spoke on the way home of what we had seen, and agreed to say nothing about it to others until we had taken time to think it over and account for it to ourselves, if that should prove possible. This is the first time I have related it to any one; but, though a week has passed, it appears to me as strange, as inexplicable, as ever.

Such is the story that was told me last night as I sat with a friend by the light of her evening fire, listening to the "keening" of the wind without. I give it, with all its minuteness, in her very words. Do I vouch, myself, for its truth? Not at all. I do not believe in ghosts or haunted houses,—the more's the pity,—but while looking into her eyes and witnessing the emotion with which she recalled that evening's adventure, I could not doubt the reality of what she told. When she had closed, we sat a moment in thought. I asked her, at length, if the figure she had seen could not have been one of the old servants who had resided in the basement for many years, taking charge of the house during the prolonged absence of its owners. These women had but lately left it; and they might have returned to recover some forgotten article through a door unknown to others. She replied that it was no servant, she was certain of that.

"And you and your companion could not have imagined what you saw?"

"Impossible."

"Then, surely, you believe in ghosts?"

"No; I cannot admit that I do."

"But you are aware that one or the other of these suppositions must be true?"

"Well, it may be; but you shall choose for yourself."

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